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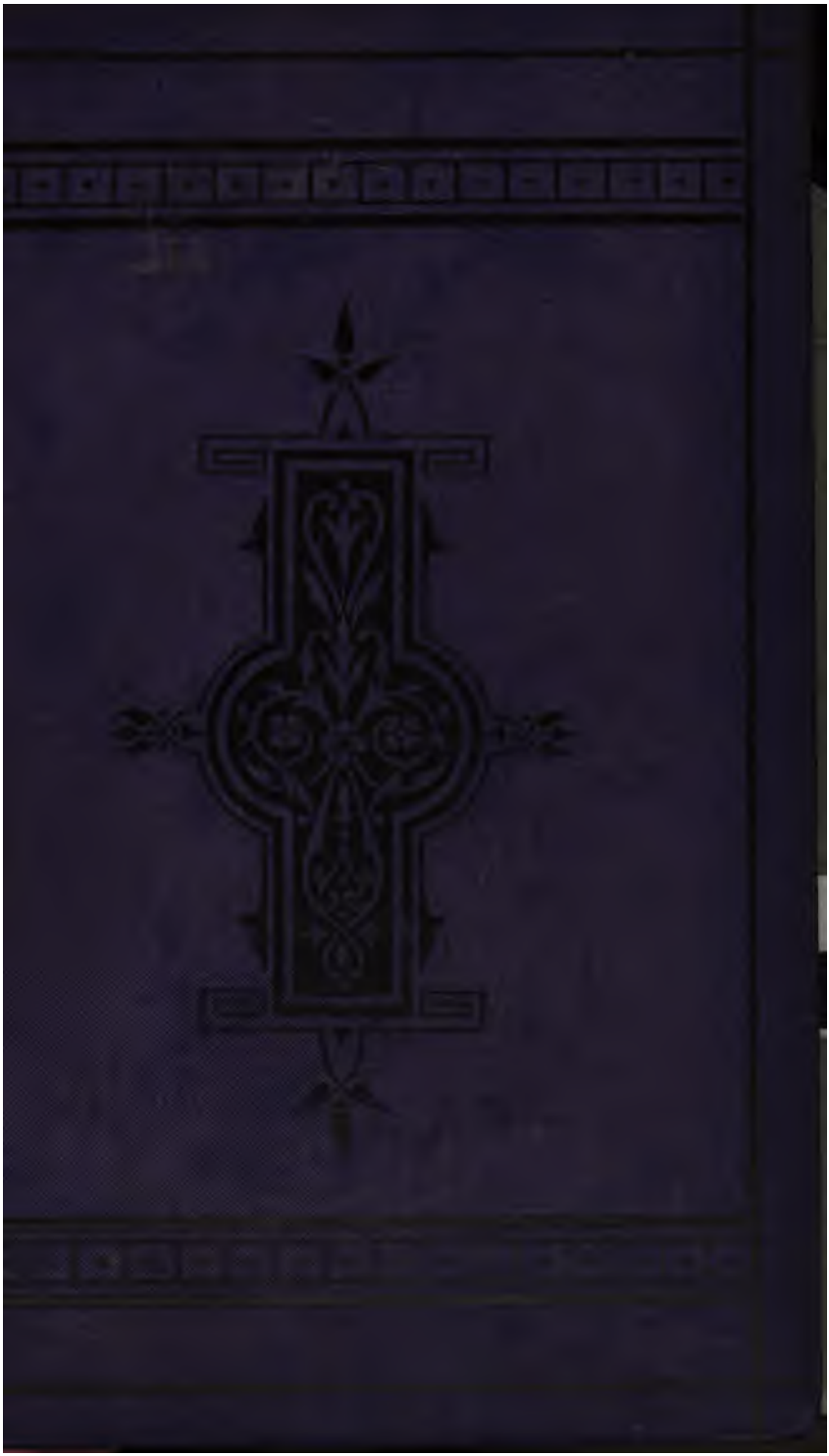

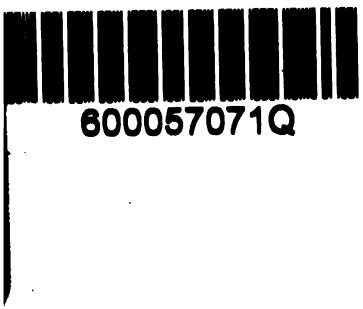
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CHEER OR KILL.

A NOVEL.

BY

ELINOR AITCH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

Vol. III.

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CHEER OR KILL.

CHAPTER I.

"It was a dream!"

HOW SEDATE SHE GROWS!

Who can date their love? Who can single out the day or hour when first the subtle seed was sown in their hearts, that afterwards sprung up, and grew, and bloomed till its roots, deep striking, were twined round the very life-fibres of their being? I am not now speaking of "love at first sight." That is a different "growth." I misdoubt me if ever its "creepers" penetrate to those secret cells where dwell the indestructable essences. It is very flourishing while it

lasts, being gorgeous as to hue and blossom, very wide-spreading, very imposing; but, nine times out of ten, it is but a silly annual, with green stalk and flaunting head, springing up, to turn brown and die at the first touch of a white frost. Then again, there is an ideal love, which is often miscalled "love at first sight"—a love that has been growing for years; the pure, pale love that has been feeding on an abstraction, and kneeling before an imaginary shrine. The love that has been worshipping a lifeless marble image day after day, and when a human figure is substituted, precisely similar in form and feature, only flushing and warm with bland vitality, worships on still with sweeter, more familiar adoration. But neither the marble image nor the life-long love being visible to men's eyes, save when they are both translated to the outer world, they dub this melting of the ideal into the real "love at first sight." As well say Pygmalion,

weeping, praying, moaning over the unresponsive lips of his beauteous statue, loved at "first sight" the lovely maiden into which the stone creation of his passionate imagination was transformed. This ideal love is essentially the poet's love—the dreamer's love; but it is not the love with which we have to do at present. It is of the slow-growing kind we wish to speak—the silent, pervading affection that is the most dangerous of all in its unobtrusive workings —the invidious disease that undermines the whole structure before the patient is even aware of its existence. Incurable? Yes, I'm afraid so. But not fatal? O no! there is no immediate danger. These deep-seated, gradual complaints are not actively destructive; with care, the patient may live for years. With *care*, yes, and with ceaseless gnawing pain, with a terrible heart-sickness that nothing can soothe or alleviate; with an intolerable inward despair that feeds on the

soul, and rests not; with the mad yearning of deathless desire checked and stifled through the day, only to burst all bounds and defy all repression at night, while the cruel rage of a famished passion, that the darkness renders bold, vents its hungry agony in sighs, and tears, and groans. Yes, we can bear all this for years. The human heart is constructed on principles that warrant its standing an incredible amount of "wear and tear"—incredible, that is to say, to the young—the young who talk of their hearts breaking when the first thunder-cloud hangs over them, the first sharp shower sent to clear the soft oppression of an atmosphere hot with hopes and misty with dreams. They don't know, as we old ones know, that what they term their heart is an organ composed of a material that combines the elasticity of indiarubber with the hard, resisting quality of granite—not a brittle piece of porcelain ware, falling to bits at the first rude jar, nor a snow-drift melting

away under a few hot tears. Never mind, let us not try and undeceive them; they will learn differently further on, when the passionate tears are wiped away; when they stand where we stand, looking back over the path by which they have come with a wild, sad wonder in their dry eyes.

How did we ever bear it, we whose feet grew tired well-nigh before they had traversed the first blithe mile of childhood's sunny sward? How did they bear us onwards over the horrible waste that intervenes, the long, long road, the weary helpless distance? How did they find the strength to tread it? And our hearts, that we thought breaking at that first disappointment, what have they borne since? Alas! what have they not borne? And still they throb on, on, slower now, thank God! the feverish pulsations are slackening. Well, well, though they couldn't break, they will grow chill and still enough, I wot, these restless hearts, when Death lays

his calm hand on them, and bids them "lie quiet."

There is no need to maunder when we have arrived pretty nearly at the end of the journey that no one is called upon to travel more than once.

Let us return to our story, and watch the struggles of a young untried heart just starting on its toilsome pilgrimage—a young heart in which a deep, deep affection has been taking root, unmarked, unwatched, unmolested. One, two, three days have passed since the pic-nic, and Maizie has not yet said "thank you" to the tutor for his plunge into the chill deep water on her behalf. It is very remiss of her. True, she has been too much engaged since, visiting, playing lawn-tennis, boating, to take her usual lessons in French and literature; yet still she surely could have spared ten minutes to run down-stairs to the study, where M. Valance has been sitting patiently through the long mornings, teach-

ing her brother the dry, dull rudiments of the dead languages. Stay! I will let you into a secret—*she has been down as far as the door every morning.* The first morning she woke up, following the night she had been taken home dripping, and given warm drinks, and wrapped in many blankets, she sprang out of bed in a bound. She was in a hurry, a great hurry, to go and tell the tutor how very grateful she was to him for fetching her out of the deep salt Straits; for all night she had been dreaming of drowning, with no one to save her, and waking up in her pretty bedroom with her limbs stretched in dry security upon her comfortable couch, she felt life was very precious to her, and that M. Valance had done her no mean service. She dressed very hurriedly. Her hair was matted and tangled with the salt water. She did not wait to take the tangles out. She tore the pretty work off her clean white dress in her haste, and did not even stay to pin it, but ran

lightly down-stairs with half-a-yard of white streamer behind her. She paused for breath before proceeding along the passage leading to the study.

Yes, they were at work, evidently, Louis and M. Valance, for the door was shut. She would go a little further, and listen for their voices to make quite sure. It was so stupid to bounce into an empty room, addressing words of greeting and gratitude to a couple of chairs and a table. Yes, they were there. She heard Louis' voice, reading; he stopped, and asked a question. M. Valance answered him. Well, good gracious me! there was nothing so frightful in those low, deep tones, that they need have made a body's heart beat to suffocation, or their cheeks flush and pale, as though about to have a tooth drawn. Oh, dear! oh, dear! what had come over her? She was nervous — the shock of her last night's immersion had upset her. Yes, she was certainly nervous. She would sit down

on the stairs to recover herself; it would never do to go into the school-room with such trembling limbs and heaving chest. They would think her ill—they would be concerned.

Hark! was that the school-room door opening? It was only Louis coming out. No, that was no boy's step, that firm, quick tread! Poor Maizie turned and fled, and spent the rest of the time before ten o'clock breakfast in mending the rent in her dress, and combing out her tangled hair. After breakfast Sir Richard and she drove to a neighbour's to spend the day. The next morning something very similar occurred, and then in the afternoon she again went out with her father to a boating pic-nic. The morning after (I am almost ashamed to tell it) she actually knocked at the school-room door, and as soon as she was bidden to enter, a panic seized her, and she turned tail and sped down the passage. She was very miser-

able about it afterwards, poor child, all day, though she was at an afternoon dance at Lady Lacy's, and had a most entertaining partner.

"Dear Miss Brooklyn looked *distrait*," old Lady Lacy had remarked. "She had heard of her very unpleasant adventure the other evening. She did not still feel any disagreeable effects?"

"She thought it must have shaken her somehow," Maizie had answered, "for she had not felt quite the same since."

That night she did not sleep well. Dreams, disturbing and alarming, visited her. She was struggling in the water, trying to catch hold of M. Valance's hand, which was always just out of reach; or she saw him standing close to a horrible precipice, and she tried to tell him of his danger, but no voice nor words would come.

The fourth morning dawns at length, rainy and warm. Maizie rises from her unrefresh-

ing slumbers with a firm determination in her mind. She will see M. Valance, and tell him; she will delay no longer. Come what may, she will force herself to enter his presence and speak the requisite words. She will force herself to do it, though she faint afterwards. Pooh! what nonsense! all the uncomfortableness will vanish as soon as she is really face to face with him. Suddenly it occurs to her that it is Saturday—a whole holiday for pupil and teacher. Serve her right, for putting it off so long! Now she will have to meet the tutor solus. Louis is sure to be out, or if not out, he will be anywhere and everywhere except in the schoolroom. He always avoids that apartment like the pest, when not engaged with his lessons. She will seek him, and take him with her on some pretext. No, she will not be so cowardly —she does not seek him, but she meets him on the stairs as she is descending.

"Louis, where is M. Valance?"

"In the school-room; it's Saturday, you know—a holiday."

"Yes, I know. Where are you going?"

"To the den" (the den is a small room at the top of the house, given over to Master Louis to make in as great a mess as he chooses.) "I'm rigging up such a jolly little cutter!—will you come and see it, May, dear?"

"No, Lou, not just now; I want to speak to M. Valance. But would you like to come with me, and then—"

"Oh, thank you!" laughs the boy, "I don't want to waste all my morning listening to you and he confabulating. I know, when you two once begin, there's no end to it."

He kisses his sister affectionately, and proceeds on his way up-stairs, three steps at a time.

There is no help for it! Maizie must venture on her undertaking alone. The best way is to make a dash at it. She runs down-

stairs, singing. Then she stops. What shall she say when she first goes into the room ?—"Good morning," first, of course; but what next? She looks out of the passage-window. It has stopped raining—just stopped; the raindrops are still dripping from the roof. She will go out, and then come to the school-room window in an easy, casual manner. It will be much better than going into the school-room in a formal or business-like manner. Off she goes into the dining-room, through the open window, hatless, and in her thin shoes. The school-room window is open. But how to get to it? for the intervening grass is white with raindrops. Never mind! if she allows any check now, it is all up. Fathomless depths of dark water did not prevent M. Valance coming to her rescue —should she let a yard or two of damp grass deter her from tendering her acknowledgment of the deed?

She is at the window, standing there with

shiny boots and bare head. She cannot see M. Valance at first; she has to peer in. The tutor is seated at the table, writing rapidly and without pause.

"M. Valance, good morning!"

There is a curious tremour in the clear voice. M. Valance looks up immediately—looks up with absent eyes, and sees the sweet shy face of his pupil framed in the window. He does not respond to her greeting, but as he gazes his eyes clear, and shine.

"It was a dream!" he says. "I remember now—it was a dream!"

She has interrupted him in his writing, thinks Maizie; he cannot attend to her. He is up in the clouds. He will not condescend to anything so commonplace as a friendly greeting; but why does he look at her so eagerly?

She feels very much inclined to depart without more ado, but she conquers the impulse, and holds on to the window-sill bravely.

"What was a dream?" she asks, low-voiced.

He smiles wistfully in answer, and then rises and comes to the window with outstretched hand.

"Good morning, Miss Maizie! Have you acquired a taste for the aquatic element that you go out on a morning like this, and stand in the soaking grass in your thin shoes?" (peering down at her shiny extremities.)

She looks away from him; he misses the frank upward glance of the grey eyes, as she answers:

"I have not seen you since, M. Valance—not to speak to—and I want to thank you—to try and thank you—for—"

"What, for pulling you out of the water?" he asks, coming to her assistance, with an amused smile lighting up his dark eyes, and curling his heavy moustache.

"Yes, it was so kind of you to risk—"

"There was no risk whatever. I can swim like a duck."

"Suppose I had clung round you, and pulled you down?"

"I knew my pupil better. Queen Guinevere is no cowardly hysterical girl. Miss Maizie, you inherit some of the stern courage that gave your father his soldier-fame."

"But there was a risk—there is always risk in circumstances of the kind. I might have become half-unconscious, and seized you without knowing it; or got cramp; or—"

"Or done everything but what you did do, in fact. Well, if you had dragged me down, what then?"

(Aye, what then? Would it have been worse or better for you two, standing as you stand now, with your eyes so full of *something* they dare not meet for fear (an unconscious "fear") of revealing? Would it be better or worse if you lay "silent in a last embrace" beneath the quiet wave, with this *something* hidden for ever from the cruel garish light of day?)

"What then, M. Valance? Why I suppose we would be lying among the sea-weed now; or perhaps, if they took the trouble to pull us up, stretched out side by side, still and stiff, to undergo a coroner's inquest—but that is not the point. You risked your life for me, for it was a risk, and I want to tell you that I am not unmindful of the deed." She holds out her hand, and raises her eyes to his—only for an instant, then they droop with their new-found shyness, and Maizie turns away her head with a movement strange to her—a constrained, shrinking movement.

He does not take her hand. He answers her almost roughly. "For pity's sake don't get into the habit of making mountains out of mole hills, Miss Maizie, there are quite enough people to do that in the world without you."

The girl looks up startled and pained—the sensitive colour springs into her fair cheeks—she turns away.

How few people there are who can leave well alone. M. Valance is certainly not one of them. He catches hold of the little hand as it is leaving the window-sill, and retains it firmly, bending out eagerly towards the bright uncovered head. "Don't look hurt—don't you know—don't you—" He stops himself with a violent effort. He lets go her hand, and stands upright. "Miss Maizie" (he continues, his voice trembling a little, despite all his efforts to the contrary), "I want you to understand that my life is of no value to me; it would have been a pleasure to me to lay it down for a friend." Silence. What base cowards words are! Just when one wants them most, they fly—just when one is surrounded by a difficult fence of feeling that they could bear us safely over, one and all they leave us in the lurch—stuttering and nonplussed. M. Valance speaks again. "I am sorry if my words sounded rudely, but it is dreadfully

aggravating to be thanked for pleasing one's self." Silence still.

"Miss Maizie, if you think it necessary to thank me, there's someone more deserving still. Captain Brace's life is by no means worthless to him."

Maizie smiles a pleased, arch smile.

"Ah! but he didn't *take* the spring, and the intention would hardly have been as effectual as the deed in this case."

"He didn't—because he couldn't—he was held back."

"By whom? How do you know?"

"I saw Miss Wilson clinging to him: she was terribly frightened."

"Lucy?"

"Yes. So you see you have another gallant preserver to thank."

"Poor Lucy!" (in the sorrowfullest, softest tone of compassion.)

"So you have another gallant preserver to thank," repeats the tutor, an insane pang of jealousy shooting from his heart.

"O no; I can't take the will for the deed in this case. I sha'n't offer any more thanks. My first experiment" (with a quick glance) "has not been successful enough to tempt me to try a second. It's rather damp standing here: I think I had better depart."

"Yes, certainly; and mind you change your shoes directly you go in."

"How sedate she grows," thinks the tutor, watching his visitress walk quietly away over the grass. He misses the quick last turn of her head, and the arch smile and nod of farewell, as he missed the frank open gaze of her eyes when she spoke with him. "How sedate she grows."

CHAPTER II.

"The old, old, story!"

"Thou my boldness ne'er canst blame."
Kunegunda.

"Never wilt thou know my flame,
None shall hear me breath thy name."
Kunegunda.

A WOUNDED HAND AND HEART.

"Lucy's hand is hurt—she cannot play," says Maizie, in answer to Captain Brace's request, that she will ask Miss Wilson to play that lovely piece he is so fond of.

It is after dinner; the Captain and Lucy have been dining at Castle Grange. Maizie is seated at the piano on which instrument she has been performing pretty continuously for the last hour.

"Hurt! how did it get hurt? How did she manage it?" asks the Captain, interestedly.

In truth he has been feeling rather compunctious ever since the evening when certain little arms clung round him, and he pushed them off roughly; yes, *roughly!*—in his vexation at seeing the tutor was beforehand with him. The girl had fallen from him with some violence. She might have fallen out of the boat; he never looked to see where she fell; he never even asked her if she hurt herself: such a tender little thing, too!

"You had better go and ask her," advises Maizie, with a sage shake of her head, indicating the place where Lucy is by herself, half-hidden by the heavy folds of a window-curtain. The little childish face is very white, to-night; and one of the small hands engaged in listless tatting is cased in a glove.

"Will she tell me, do you think, or will she think me impertinent?"

"I don't know."

So the Captain gets up from his seat by the piano, and crosses the room to where

little pale Lucy Wilson is sitting on a low chair in the window, partly concealed by the loosened curtain. Lady Brooklyn nodding in her comfortable arm-chair, opens one eye and blinks in feeble wonderment at this change of programme. Sir Richard pauses for a moment, in his animated political conversation with old Major Evans, and glances gravely at the Captain, and then at Maizie. Has the girl lost patience and given way to a hasty speech that has sent her lover flying? No, there is no sign of agitation on either countenance. Sir Richard resumes his argument. Poor Lucy! "I ween she seeth thro' her eyelids, they droop adown so low"—the tall sauntering figure in evening dress that is advancing towards her; for her crochet-needles are trembling impotently, like a couple of straws caught by the rough autumn wind from Sir Richard's stacked hay. There, it's no use!—it's all in a knot; inextricably entangled, like her own little heart!

"Rather in a mess, isn't it?" asks the voice belonging to the tall figure that has approached her, and is standing just in her light.

"Yes" (bending down head, and burning cheeks, and fumbling blindly at her spoilt piece of work).

"I wouldn't try to untangle it if I were you; it's evidently hopeless," proceeds the Captain, and he bends down and takes the silly little entangled bit of crochet in his hand, and examines it with his eye-glass.

Lucy gets up nervously, and pulls aside the window curtain. It is a fair, moon-lit night—light almost as day.

"I was hoping to hear you play my favourite piece to-night; but Miss Brooklyn tells me you have hurt your hand," says the Captain, when he has completed his investigations of the unfortunate piece of crochet.

"Yes—I'm sorry I can't; it is nothing of a hurt — only one of my fingers a little

scratched," stammers Lucy, fidgeting with her gloved hand.

Captain Brace comes nearer. "How did you do it?" he asks softly, laying his hand on the tiny gloved hand in question.

"I—oh, I don't exactly know."

"Since when has it been sore?"

"I think perhaps I did it that day we went a picnic—Maizie and I, and M. Valance and Louis. We had such a scramble over the rocks; you don't——"

"Did the rocks hurt it?"

"They might have."

"*Did* they?"

What a shame to press her so, when all the time it was the horrid bit of broken rullock on the side of the boat that cut her tender flesh—when he flung her from him. What a shame to press her so, when all the time he guesses how it happened. How Maizie would have wreathed back upon him if he had teased her so; how scornfully she

would have declared it to his face, and told him to be ashamed of himself in the same breath. But Lucy—poor, gentle little Lucy! —she whose fault it had always been to be too gentle—she who could never summon up sufficient hardihood to knowingly hurt even an enemy's feelings—would rather die (and this is no figure of speech) than cause a moment's vexation to the man beside her. She tries to answer him; she seeks for something to say. She looks up desperately at the handsome sun-burnt face near her, and then the fear and shame and love struggling in her sorrowful little heart overcome her completely, and she leans her head against the window-frame, and bursts into tears.

Captain Brace, as has been before remarked, is a man of the world—the veteran of a thousand social manœuvres. His tact does not forsake him now. He walks across the room to Maizie, who is looking over some music.

"The night is beautiful; will you come for a stroll, Miss Brooklyn?" he asks.

Maizie looks at the uncurtained window, through which a flood of moonlight is streaming, and consents.

There is another window nearer them, with the curtains still drawn. Captain Brace goes towards it in preference to the one against which that quiet little figure is leaning with bowed head. In a moment he has thrown the curtains aside, and opened the window to its sash.

"Will not Lucy come?" asks Maizie, as she steps out into the calm, fair night.

"Presently, I will go and fetch her."

"Captain Brace!"

"Miss Brooklyn!"

"What fools men are!"

"Are they? I daresay!"

"So dense—so thankless—so unappreciative."

"Yes. And women?"

"Do not ride roughshod over tender things that lie in their path from trustful innocence!"

"No; they step over the hearts cast at their feet, with a cool carefulness that hurts far more than actual scorn! They lift their dainty skirts as they pass by the wounded thing, so that no hot blood shall stain their airy skimmer! Is it not so?"

"No; but if it were, surely this cool carefulness is better than the dull cruelty that treads the hurt heart to death, and has ears too coarse to hear its moan, and eyes too nearsighted to behold its bleeding."

"Perhaps this deafness is caused by pity, perhaps this blindness is caused by tears."

"But it is *not*."

"I am not so sure."

"You had better go and fetch Lucy. She is very fond of moonlight."

"Very well, if you'll wait here."

"O, I can't promise!"

"I'll not be gone a minute—you can sit down there" (indicating the bench beneath the trees).

"No, thanks; it looks too dark in there. I'll stroll along—and away," she adds aloud to herself as soon as the Captain is out of hearing.

Lucy, with her face hidden, has heard the window open, and then the voices of Maizie and Captain Brace outside. She will stay where she is. No one will disturb her. She may be as miserable as she likes. She may cry on, and on, to her heart's content; but the bitter tears that came at so inopportune a moment, will not flow now. Only pictures of what they are doing and saying out in the glorious moonlight pass before her aching eyes. O, why was she born at all, just to suffer without strength nor hope? Pain did not make her wiser or nobler. She could only cry and moan as an infant might, and turn longingly to Mother

Earth's cold bosom. Not that timid Lucy wishes consciously for death—her nature is not passionate enough to court that dire extremity. But through the whole saddened soul of her, there is an apathetic want of rest and forgetfulness that makes her thoughts wander to mossy graveyards, and stone-cut inscriptions that proclaim the story over—the tale sad or merry, short or long—to be finished. Hark! she hears some one coming in at the open window. Captain Brace come to fetch a cloak for Maizie. He will probably go and look for one in the hall.

"Miss Wilson, I have come to fetch you; it is heavenly outside."

Yes, no doubt a moon-lit Eden for two; for a third person—and that person herself—a sterile wilderness enough. It was just like Maizie's kindness to think of her. Of course she had sent him to ask her.

"No, thank you; I don't care to go out to-night. I feel it cold."

"Cold ?—I will get you a shawl."

"No, no!"

But the Captain is gone, and returns shortly with the warm white shawl Lucy left in the hall when she came.

"Here, put this on, you will not feel cold then, and really it's a pity to stay indoors on such a fairy-like night."

He wraps her up, and Lucy thrilled, and passive under his hands, submits without a word.

"Where is Maizie?" she asks, when they stand together beneath the calm stars.

"Here—she said she'd be here."

"I don't see her."

"She can't be far, let us sit down on the bench till she appears."

They sit down, and Lucy covers up her gloved hand with a fold of her shawl. Captain Brace catches the movement unobtrusive as it is.

"Let me see this 'scratch'" he says,

of Theckla in Wallenstein. Here in this silent field—here, with only the shadowy trees for audience, she rehearses this latest conception of her passionate genius. She loses herself. She forgets past, present, and to come, in delicious abandonment to her artist instincts. For one brief hour she lets the pent-up power take its course—gives rein to to the wild struggling faculty; and then,—then a check supervenes. She stands still in the dewy grass; her brow erewhile triumpant and raised to the free heavens, droops sadly and shamefully towards the earth. Her figure loses its nervous, pliant curves all at once, and grows stiff and feeble. Slowly she creeps back to her old seat on the timber, and leans her face in her hands, while great dreary tears gather sluggishly in her down-bent eyes, and drop noiselessly upon the cold wet grass at her feet.

* * * * *

Seated at the table, before his bed-room

window, right in a flood of moonlight, M. Valance is writing away in the thick book with the patent lock that is never far from his side. He has no candle or lamp. The clear, white light of the moon is sufficient for his purposeless scribblings. Purposeless they surely are, for he commits them to paper with a blunt lead pencil, whose tracings must necessarily become smudged and obliterated with time. Often has Maizie begged to be allowed to peep into this dog-eared, battered book; but the tutor has always refused.

"There was nothing in it that would interest her," he would say—"nothing but the wildest expressions of the dreariest folly. He wrote merely as a relief. He had no one to whom he could talk nonsense; so, as a relief, he had to get rid of his superfluous imbecility by means of a stumpy pencil and a few bound sheets of foolscap, which could easily be burnt when done with."

We are privileged, dear Reader. Let us profit by the dispensation to glance into this man's heart, as expressed on the paper before him. He has already filled two pages with close characteristic writing. He is just in the middle of a sentence—"a calm I had hoped would rest unbroken. Surely one may hope and expect an enduring calm after such bitter shipwreck as I have suffered, yet this new madness grows and grows; these storm-waves of irresistible passion swell higher and higher, and I, who had thought till now that my will was strong enough to hide the pang of dissolution itself, quail and tremble in her presence like a girl. It must be conquered. How many times a day do I tell myself so? It must be conquered. Even in my dreams the sense of mortal struggle is present with me; and yet, after all—after I have schooled my face to indifference, my hands to steadiness, my eyes to speak a lie—she comes with her soft, shy

face and sweet-toned voice, and I am at a loss. I blunder. I am rude. I nearly betray myself. I almost utter words it would be be death to breathe. It is treason to stay here any longer. I must go. I own my defeat. Ah! dream-face! Ah! sweet, sweet vision of a joy not to be! Ah! cruel dream, to bring a hope so false! Ah! miserable me, to cherish such a hope so brought! O, God!—God! I have been misled! Behold Thy angels whom thou sendest to comfort me in my woe, spoke a lie to my sleeping ear! A lie which was yet a truth; an empty shell of truth with a rotten falsehood hidden in it; a ghastly wormwood of meaning which my lips closed upon, and which is turning my innermost parts to gall. Woe is me; I have been mocked! The star which was shewn me in the darkness, and which I have followed all these years so confidently—so hopefully, halts at length over the scene of my heaviest grief, and then fades and

vanishes! Ah me!—what a bitter climax to a bitter life. Would I had never—no I cannot wish that—cannot wish I had not seen *thee*, my darling—seen thee in the flesh, breathing, living, beautiful, though thy glance should slay me the morrow morn, I would thank God with my dying breath for having vouchsafed to me a sight of thy perfections. I must go away."

The tutor looks up after writing this inexorable sentence—this death-knell to all his happiness—and sees two figures walking in the garden below: one has a white shawl carefully wrapped over her head and shoulders; her face is not visible—it is bent over some dew-laden flowers. The man-figure — he knows it. Captain Brace is standing very close; he stretches out his hand and——But M. Valance sees no more, for he gets up and shuts the window and the shutters — shuts out the sweet mocking moonlight, and the pretty maddening

pastoral—then gropes about the darkened room for matches; lights both his candles, and proceeds with his scribbling.

"Why is it hard for me to leave her? Can I be more completely parted from her than I am now? What is distance. So many miles—so much space, hiding her from my eyes (I, who see her always, sleeping or waking), to the dark impassable gulf of sin and sorrow that surges between our souls; and as if that were not enough, the guardian-angel of another man's love interposes his bright form, and waves me forever from her side, with the two-edged sword of might and right. He is not worthy of thee, sweet! What am I saying? I, to talk of *worth*. He, at least has no dark blot upon his life—no lost hideous years of which he can give no account. Worthy?—yes, worthy as a king; for he loves her, and he is an honourable man! But alas! he will never fully comprehend her. His intellect is not mighty

enough to span the height of her soul—nor sound the depths of her mind. The rare beauty of her peerless nature must ever remain a sealed book to him. He will possess her body, but never her spirit; for to *possess*, one must understand and grasp. Maizie will make a loving wife! She has a true, affectionate heart. I daresay it will take years for her to recognize how much below her in intellectual range her husband ranks; and when she does make the discovery, she will keep it to herself, and be more tenderly subject to him than ever. Noble in all her ways—pure and strong—passionate and innocent—the flower of her nature will be an immortal love. She will wreath it about his brows, and worship him as king of her life. What might not a man become who wore this wreath? I must go away! Where! It does not matter—it will not be difficult to obtain a situation. I must go away—never to see her any more—never

through the long, long days and years. O the interminable days! — O the endless, endless years! Maizie, my pupil — my darling! Maizie, the one woman who has crept into this worn and tortured heart! what shall I do without you? O God! it is enough! Take away my life!"

* * * * *

Just at this moment a girl without cloak or hat, passing along in the moonlight, under the window, glances up at the closed shutters of the tutor's room; glances up wistfully, as if some mysterious instinct hints to her of the suffering that is being undergone within.

M. Valance gets up from his chair, and paces up and down—up and down. His face is very white, his brow is knitted, his eyes fixed and absent. It is a horrible wrench, even when love is hopeless, to force oneself for ever from the loved one's presence. Though every minute of our intercourse with

such an one be fraught with a hundred jealous pangs, there is a fascination in the very *pain* that woos us to prolong it. Anything—anything is preferable to separation. All love's instincts preach against it. "I may never see her again." There is always this fear; life is so uncertain. "I shall suffer less if I leave her; absence will cool the intensity of my affection; and yet—and yet I would rather suffer the torments of hell than be absent from her."

> "It may be yet the gods will make me glad;
> Yet Love I would that thee and pain I had."

M. Valance re-seats himself and re-opens his manuscript. With a hand that does not tremble, he draws a strong black line through the sentence he last wrote, and writes instead, "God help me to live my life." (When despair resolves to prayer, it is conquered). "My duty lies plain before me. I must go away. There must be no lingering—no paltering with this temptation that has taken

me. I have had warning of my own weakness. Her father entrusts his daughter to my keeping. I will not betray the trust. I am not sufficiently master of my passion to live daily in her presence and make no sign. Some men could do this perhaps; I dare not try. My strength is as weakness before her. It only remains for me to say good-bye—a long good-bye. This very night I will bid Sir Richard look out for another preceptor for Louis. I am sorry to leave the lad. He has an affection for me, and love—love from any human soul is precious to me. Good-bye, Louis; good-bye, fair-haired, true-hearted boy. May you live and prosper, and may you never grow less pure—less truthful. I have tried to teach you courage and sincerity as well as Greek and Latin; may you never forget the teaching—the teacher you may forget. Good-bye, Sir Richard; you have been a kind friend to me. I honour and love you; my heart is loyal to

you; I would serve you to the death. Farewell, Maizie—sweetheart. I may call you so to-night; this foolish old book will tell no tales; and to-night I must bid you good-bye. Sweetheart—sweetheart, may God bless thee! May thy life be sunshine—sweetest sunshine—all the way. O, God, guard her; guard her. The sorrow Thou hadst appointed her, I pray Thee let it fall on my head! keep her fresh young years unshadowed; I can live without happiness, but she is so young—so tender—I pray Thee give her that which she requires most, and shield her heart from bitterness. I know not what is best for her; but Thou knowest. I pray Thee give it to her; and if in any way, by my life or death, I can serve or aid her; if by any sacrifice or suffering I can add one iota to her happiness, O, I pray Thee, permit me in Thy infinite mercy to offer myself body and soul on this dear altar—to live or to die; the pains of life or the

pains of death. I am willing and ready to suffer all—both for her sake; and this Thou knowest. I do not ask Thee to let us meet again; nay, I pray Thee hold us apart until we meet in Thy Kingdom. Maizie, I greet thee: good-bye, darling—darling; never to know, never to guess that thou art my darling. Good-bye—good-bye.

* * * * *

"I must stop these weak expressions of a love that cannot be expressed. It is half-past ten o'clock; the guests must have gone. Sir Richard will be in his library. I will seek him there, and tell him my resolution before I sleep."

CHAPTER III.

——"Leave me not
Wild, drear, and comfortless,
As silent lightening leaves the starless night."
(*Adonais*).

"I LEAVE HER TO YOUR CARE."

A FEW days pass quietly and quickly. Maizie is in the dining-room practising. It is morning—only eleven o'clock. She has just finished playing a rather brilliant transcription of "Love's Young Dream," and is hunting in her portfolio for another morceau to practise, when, through the folding-doors that shut off the school-room, she hears the sound of some one sobbing. She lets the music drop—and listens. Yes; there is no mistake about it. Some one is crying bitterly, but quietly, as trying hard to stifle

the emotion. Poor Louis in disgrace! Yet she has never known him cry like that at his lessons. What can have happened? She will go and see. M. Valance is not there, for she heard him go upstairs to his own room half-an-hour ago. She will go and see what is the matter. The folding-doors are locked; she goes round to the other door, and knocks. No one answers; but the sobs cease, and all is silent. A sudden fear seizes her, perhaps M. Valance is there all the time. He might possibly have returned without her hearing him. Still all is silent. She calls "Louis!" A great burst of pent-up sobs answers her, and she hesitates no longer to enter. Louis is all alone, seated at the table with his arms leaning on it, and head bent prone upon them—crying as if his heart is breaking. "Louis, Louis! what is the matter?" asks Maizie, much concerned. "Tell me, dear" (putting her arms round him, and trying to raise his

head), "tell me what has happened." But Louis cannot speak—the kind voice—the pitying touch have caused his grief to break out afresh. He can only catch Maizie's hands and press them to his hot brow, and sob on. Maizie sits down beside him, and takes his head upon her shoulder—soothing and calming him with loving kisses, and mute fond motions. She asks no more questions. She waits patiently till the paroxysm of boyish sorrow shall have spent itself.

It is Louis who speaks first, raising his swollen face and quivering lips for a moment to sob out, "He is going away—M. Valance is going away."

"Going away?"

The heart that is pillowing the boy's head so tenderly, gives one great unnatural throb —then its pulses hesitate, beating weakly and dizzily. Maizie does not faint, but she is very near it—nearer than she knows. She clasps the boy closer.

"When?" she asks; but her voice is so low—he does not hear her, absorbed as he is in his own grief.

"When?" She bends down her lips to his ear.

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow!"

She repeats it after him; but she does not in the least comprehend the meaning of the word, nor the length of time it signifies.

When we have received a stunning blow, it is not possible that we can understand all at once the nature, or form of that which has given it us. It was hard, very hard; but whether it was the wall or the chimney-piece, we are not sure, with this dizziness before our eyes, this distracting singing in our ears. She retains Louis in her arms; but the effort is entirely mechanical. She no longer caresses him, nor attempts to soothe him. How can one comfort another, when one's own heart is turning to stone? How can we

essay to dry another's tears, when our own eyes court the sweet relief in vain? Perhaps Louis feels the deadly chill of the heart he is leaning against—the stiff, untender embrace of the weary arms that hold him, for he swallows back his tears; and disengaging himself, he sits upright in his chair, and looks wonderingly at his whilom comforter.

"Maizie! are you not sorry—you don't cry, but your cheeks are so white—so white. Are you going to faint?"

"No, I'm not going to faint," (the white lips part in a strange smile—half sweet—half bitter.)

"Are you not sorry?—Are you not sorry?" (sob) "He has been so kind to you."

"So kind."

"Are you not sorry then, Maizie—Maizie?"

"Sorry!"

Maizie is puzzled. Is she sorry? Is that what makes her so cold? Is that what

makes the patch of sunlight lying on the window-curtain to hurt her, as though it had somehow stolen into her heart and was scorching it? She has often been sorry before; but she has never felt like this before—never. She is sorry to see Louis's eyes so red—his face so woe-begone; but sorry because M. Valance is going? It won't do—she must rouse herself. She feels so walled in—so helpless—so oppressed. She gets up, but she totters. She is giddy. Where does she want to go? She may as well sit down again—it is all the same. She reseats herself, and draws an open book towards her. It happens to be her French-grammar.

"It is no use learning that, Maizie; M. Valance will not be able to hear it; he is going away early to-morrow!" says Louis, sighing, and getting up listlessly.

He walks to the window, and leans out. Maizie does not answer his remark. She continues to scan a row of French sentences,

with an italicized English version fronting them. She reads them all steadily, one after another, and every phrase seems to mean the same. "Going early to-morrow! Early to-morrow! Going early—early."

"I am going out," says Louis, turning round. "It's horrid staying here where M. Valance has taught me day after day! It's horrid to see his chair there just the same, and to know he will not teach me any more! Will you come too, Maizie?"

Maizie does not answer; her eyes are still bent upon her book.

"Maizie, will you come?" he repeats, pausing by her chair.

"Come?"

"Yes; I'm going away from this."

"Going away?"

"You are not thinking a bit about what I am saying; you are muddling your head over those stupid verbs, though I tell you it's no use, for M. Valance said we need not

learn any more lessons for him. I don't believe you care a bit that he is going away; you don't even say you are sorry. It's a great shame."

And off marches Louis with indignant step and tearful face, mistaking, as wiser and older people have done before him, the point where extremes meet, and confounding the dread paralysis of intensest suffering with the careless *sang-froid* of chill indifference.

Maizie sits on when he has left her. The only movement she makes is to push away the grammar, and let her forehead rest on the oilcloth-covered table. I don't think she either thinks or feels much. The end has come—the end of something; the bitterness of death is upon her—the shadow of parting. In all her young life this darkness has not fallen on her before. The Loved have always been the Near. The shadow of the curse has overtaken her now—the shadow that some say is more terrible than the

substance: the death in life of love and nearness; the separation in the sun-light, complete and entire, when hands are warm and hearts beat strongly. Never to see thee again! I who have loved, and lived by thy side day after day; and it is not death that has come between us, but life—not the silence of the Dark Valley, but the noise and tumult of careless, busy days. It is on the young that this parting falls heaviest. This sounds parodoxical; for surely the young have more hope of a reunion in the years to come. It is the young, nevertheless, that feel this wrench most despairingly. The old have met and parted so often, they have faith in time; the young have not learned the hope of experience. They part; the minutes are years, the hours centuries. They see no possibility of a re-meeting; therefore there can be none. The old, accustomed to the shifting changes and chances of life, are aware of its huge possibilities. They cannot

despair; it is ridiculous. Who can tell what a day may bring forth? They part, they are sorry; but they will meet again to-morrow, or ten years hence; and time passes so swiftly when once the hands of life have passed the meridian. Poor golden head, bowed in this first despair! Poor, passionate heart, too young for hope; unconscious of aught but pain. It fares but ill with you on this first entering into the shadow of our mortality.

Maizie does not move; the clock ticks audibly; the sun-light lies in pleasant patches on the curtains and window-sill.

Half-an-hour passes. Maizie lifts her head for an instant to glance at the clock. A quarter to twelve. Not an *hour* ago she was still in the sun-light, and now she has only got thus far in her future life of darkness—only borne forty-five minutes of this new existence. How would she bear it on to the end?

It is insupportable; it is dreadful beyond

thought — beyond feeling. It is despair. The head sinks again. No sooner is it re-pillowed on the recumbent arms, than the door-handle is grasped from the outside, turned quickly, and M. Valance enters.

"Louis," he begins. "Maizie!" It is difficult to say which of the two are most startled—the tutor or the pupil. "Miss Maizie," repeats M. Valance, replacing the title he has dropped in his surprise, "what are you doing here? I told Louis to tell you."

"He has told me," rising and fronting the tutor; "he has told me all."

M. Valance sits down at the table, without looking at her, and draws his desk towards him. It is a moment or two before he can unlock it, his strong hands are trembling so with the unexpected *rencontre*. He would manage not to see her again, he had been telling himself. He would absent himself from lunch, and spend the afternoon in his own

room. It was not her day for a French lesson. He would be gone almost before the time of her rising in the morning, certainly before she would have descended. He has not calculated on this. He is unmanned, astonished, moved beyond expression.

"He has told me all," repeats Maizie, falteringly, standing where she has risen, and looking across at the tutor with great despairing eyes.

"Well, it's not a very great 'all' to tell."

He is obliged to answer roughly. One cannot modulate one's tones and choose one's tenses when nerves and senses are quivering in the grasp of a supreme passion, like leaves in an autumn blast.

M. Valance has come down to write a letter. He takes some note paper out of his desk, and dips his pen in the ink, but he dare not attempt to write until his hands are steadier.

"You are going away?" comes the low voice from the other side of the table.

"Yes. Miss Maizie, I am rather busy."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes! Didn't I hear you practising?"

"*To-morrow.*"

There are tears in the soft full voice—are there tears in those dear grey eyes? He dare not look up to see. Perhaps he had better go away, desk and all—it will be the safest way. Without once looking at the girl he rises up, his desk and paper in his hand, his lips compressed, his eyes cast down. He gets as far as the door, his hand is on the handle, when a voice reaches him.

"M. Valance!"

It is a voice he cannot disregard—a tone speaking close to his heart. The cry for aid of one dearly beloved, who can withstand? He hears some of the helpless anguish of Maizie's heart in the voice that calls his name.

"M. Valance, why are you leaving me?" it says—"Why this cool avoidance where I have always found comfort, and help, and kindliness?"

He turns back—he hesitates; then with one of those efforts that only men of strong will and habitual self-control can make, he crushes down for a moment his emotion, and advances to the girl standing by the table, with clasped hands and wild dry eyes.

"Miss Maizie!" (holding out both hands to her) "I suppose I had better say good-bye to you now, I shall be busy packing this afternoon. I may not see you again."

She places her hands in his, but she does not speak.

"Good-bye," he repeats hoarsely.

He tries to disengage his hands.

The mute lips part at last—part in wild expostulation.

"I cannot say good-bye! I cannot—cannot—cannot let you go! I cannot live my life without you; I cannot—*I cannot!*"

"Hush, hush, what do you mean?"

"What I say; if it had not been for you I should not be here now; without your help and comfort I cannot bear my life."

"Miss Maizie, you must learn to stand alone."

"But not yet—not yet; some day when I am stronger and better you can go, but oh, if you leave me now, I shall fail and fall."

"What! break your vow?"

"Yes, and my father's heart, M. Valance" (letting go his hands and standing before him with bowed head and heaving breast); "already I have half broken my promise, I have been acting again; though only to myself, in the fields at night."

"What nights? When?"

"Three nights ago, and last night; I could not help it. I struggled against it all day, but the part took possession of me, I had to give expression to it. I had to—"

"Did you go out by yourself, in your evening dress, into the cold wet fields?"

"Yes."

"It was not right, nor honourable, it must not happen again."

"M. Valance, I have inherited this madness—it is bred in my bone. If I am left without support I shall fail, as my mother failed."

"Your mother?"

"She was an actress. Papa told me all about her that night. She left him. She preferred her art to his love; and yet she loved him he said."

"Your mother an actress? What was her maiden name—do you know?"

M. Valance's tone is that of sharp inquiry. He is gazing at the girl now;—straight into those beautiful grey eyes, as if in their lucid depths he has discovered a loathsome crawling horror that at once fascinates, and shocks him.

"Let me think for a moment; I have forgotten it."

She bows her forehead on her hand.

"Make haste," says the tutor, hoarsely.

"I know it all the time, and yet I can't

quite get it. It was something beginning with M; a French name—rather a—"

"Hundreds of names begin with M—especially French names—Marimont, Marchment, Misant, Macon, Mireille; it was Mireille perhaps—I feel sure it was Mireille."

"No" (musingly), "not Mireille, something like it though. Her christian name was Marie, like mine—Marie—Marie. Oh I have it!" (a sudden light of intelligence flashing into her eyes)—Marie de Mailly."

"Not that—not *that!*"

M. Valance's arm is outstretched, as though to push away some threatening overwhelming foe; his face is turned aside and hidden in his other hand.

"Yes, that was the name. What is the matter M. Valance; did you know anyone of that name?"

M. Valance does not answer. Into what frightful abyss has he fallen? How can he find a footing? Down—down—down! Oh

God! the fathomless horror — the hellish gloom. His spirit, even as it sinks, despairing, amazed, sends up to heaven a protesting cry—"unjust, unjust."

"Did you know anyone of that name? Did you know my mother?" repeats Maizie, wonderingly.

At the reiterated question he turns to her. She has never seen his face so white, nor his eyes so steady and sweet.

"I knew your mother," he said simply, "Marie de Mailly was my dearest friend."

There is a tender radiance on his brow, and round his mouth almost like a smile.

"I am so glad!" says the girl, holding out her hands to him, with glistening eyes. "So very, very glad; for now I know you will not leave her daughter to fail and fall!"

The tutor is silent; his face is slightly raised as if listening. A voice silenced long ago, is speaking to him, a sweet voice from among the angels, has paused in its blissful

strain to whisper down the old entreaty: "My little Marie; I leave her to your care —you will guard her!" It is his duty to stay and fulfil his vow, made to that fair dead woman—the mother of the girl before him. His duty—his duty to stay and guard, and help her: his imperative duty. Strange metamorphosis! His temptation of a moment since, presented to him as the fulfilment of a sacred trust. But would it not be guarding her better to leave her—he, who loves her so? Would it not be fulfilling the spirit of that last injunction, to go away for fear of harming her whom he has vowed to protect with his life?

"You will not go away, at any rate yet?" pleads the soft human voice at his side, as if his own inclination, and those potent spirit-tones were not sufficient to subdue him.

"Miss Maizie!" (seizing her hands, and gazing with strained earnestness into her eyes) "are you sure you need me? Are

you sure I can help you, *really?* Are you sure?"

"Help me! Need you! O! M. Valance, I cannot find courage without you—I cannot live on through the vacant days!"

All the teasing shyness and inexplicable reserve that have troubled Maizie during the last few days, fade and disappear before the urgent insupportable pain of parting. She must retain him. He, on whom her whole life leans. He, whose voice alone can still the stormy passions of her soul. She must cling to him; she must hold to him as the ship-wrecked sailor to the saving rope—as the over-matched warrior to his trusty shield. Her eyes, no longer averted, cleave to his face, full of piteous prayer. Her hands, that have scarcely touched his of late, clasp and cling about him with the freedom of despair.

"You will not leave me?" she utters, pleadingly, for the tutor is silent, gazing at her with the same steadfast, heart-broken look,

as though he would read her soul, and fashion his fate according to her need, whether for life or death. The spirit of the man, made pure and strong by a life of utmost pain and loss, is rising; rising above earth's passions, above its needs and longings; above the keen strange anguish of a love cast back, and ignored, rising even to the height of angels. It is no hard, heroic height, however; no stern, cold triumph; no chill, inhuman victory. As the strained, intense look dies out of the dark eyes fixed on Maizie's face, a soft mist of tears supervenes: a tender, holy sorrow. M. Valance lifts one of the little urgent hands to his lips, gently, but passionlessly: as though it were the dead hand of some saint, whose soul had fled forever out of human reach to sit among its peers.

"I will not leave you, my child, as long as you need me—as long as it is in my power to serve and help you I will do so—so help me God!"

CHAPTER IV.

EXTRACT FROM M. VALANCE'S SCRIBBLING-BOOK A FORTNIGHT LATER.

"OCTOBER 21st.—It has been hard work. My life has not been an easy one; the tasks and duties that have been presented to me from time to time have not been facile. Yet this latest test—this strain of heart—this daily, hourly wrestle against 'principalities and powers'—this ceaseless, relentless martyrdom of feeling and desire, exceed and render insignificant all past conflicts. I have not given way; my strength has not failed hitherto; I have kept watch and ward, strict and unwavering, over words and looks and motions. To be one's own jailor; to stand at the Gate of Paradise; to hold the gate

shut with one's own hand, and look in at the dreamy, restful shadows, and still, sweet waters; to hear the sounds of a heavenly voice chanting blissful things, and catch glimpses of tender, twining hands, and soft, yearning lips; to do this, is to be consumed by a slow, wearing fire. It is, perhaps, to engender madness; to lose sound nerves, refreshing sleep; to shorten life—a life that dies daily. But it is possible, as heroism is possible; the rack and the pile; the charred body and stainless soul; the merciless tortures and the unperjured lips. Yes, it is possible, and I have not shrunk from it, nor do I; but——

"October 30th.—What have I done? What have I done? What does it mean? Have I been dreaming at my post? Was it but a fancy—a chimera? or did I see a pair of hands beckon me to enter?—a pair of white, white hands stretch out from among the rare green leaves and blossoms of Para-

dise? Is it true that eyes, the sweetest I have ever looked upon, turned their tender glances on mine a moment, and spoke to them what can never be forgotten nor foregone. * * * O, divine, maddening instant; quick as death; full as eternity. O, revelation, too dazzling to be credited—too heavenly-sweet to be doubted. My queen! my queen! I who would die for thee. What have I done? what have I done? I, who strove to shield thee even with my heart! I, who laid my very soul in the dust day by day to make a safe passage for thy maiden feet! I, who have crucified desire and buried hope, and never let thee even *guess* the presence of a cross or grave! I to have wrought thee the worst doom—the cruelest wrong! God! this shall not be! Slay me! torture me! cheat me! Make the truth I saw in her eyes a lie! Cast me into the nethermost hell of despair! Shut out all hope—all light! Turn her heart from me!

If there is no other way take her to Thyself. * * * O, fool, and blind, not to have thought; not to have seen. How dared I — I, with my tainted hands — to meddle with her sweet and snow-pure life? How could I ever hope to bring a blessing to her? How came I to deceive myself with anticipations of helping her? *Help her!* I, who cannot help myself; I, whose whole life has been a helpless sacrifice; I, who could not save one hope out of the piteous wreck of my existence—to try and give her comfort! Marie, Marie! why did you ask it? I have done wrong. I should have gone at once. I should have made haste to rid her of my doomful presence; that should have been my first care; that was really the most important duty. I see it now; I see it all now. Maizie, Maizie, Maizie! what shall I do if I find that in striving to help thee I have hurt thee to the death? I will repair my error the best way I can. I will go at once.

"Nov. 1st.—A terrible thing has happened. Old Sir Richard has had a stroke. The doctors say Maizie will soon be fatherless. I cannot leave her now. I am the only one she has to lean upon and trust. I must stand by her till—till it is all over. Poor child; she can hardly be persuaded to leave his side to take necessary food and rest. I have had to go and lead her away several times at the request of Lady Brooklyn. She will obey no one else; but I have only to lay my hand on hers, and she rises up and follows me. I have fed her with my own hands when she has been too exhausted and sad to eat; and afterwards have laid her down on a couch and watched her fall asleep. She does not speak to me; she does not thank me, except with those great, haggard, tender eyes of hers.

"Nov. 4th.—Sir Richard still continues in the same state. The doctors say he may inger on a day or two, but that recovery is

impossible. He is only partially conscious. They say he will probably become quite conscious before death. Maizie is with him constantly, night and day. Sir Richard seemed to miss her when she left him for a moment this morning; his eyes wandered round the room as if searching for her. Captain Brace is engaged to Miss Lucy Wilson, so Lady Brooklyn tells me. She also confided to me that he proposed to Maizie a couple of months ago, and she refused him. I remember meeting them in the oak wood about that time; that same evening she came and sat down by my side, and asked me why I was sad, and kissed my hand. Pitying angel! tender woman's heart! How dared I vex her with my selfish sorrow—my sore jealousy? She has grown so white and thin during the last few days, it makes my heart bleed to see her. She nearly fainted when I fetched her from the room this afternoon. We were in the dining-

room, and her eyes fell on her father's overcoat and hat lying on the side table. I caught her as she staggered, and held her in my arms. 'If I could bear it for you,' I said. She looked in my face, deathly white as she was, and smiled; such a smile!

"Nov. 7th.—It is all over. Sir Richard breathed his last at five o'clock this morning. He had been conscious for about an hour before. We were all with him. He had summoned us to his side to bid good-bye. His wife was kneeling on one side of the bed, his daughter on the other; her arm was round his neck, his head was pillowed on her breast. Lady Brooklyn was sobbing audibly. Maizie was still and silent; I noticed that her eyes were dry. Louis was clinging to me, sobbing and shivering, in his night-shirt. His mother had been ill-advised enough to wake him, and bring him from his bed to see his step-father die. Fearing the child would be made ill (he is a delicate boy)

by the exposure and fright, I lifted him in my arms, and carried him back to bed. When I returned the baronet was speaking in a voice strangely hollow, and strong. 'I see things clearer now, now that I am going. Maizie, I absolve you from your promise. Where is M. Valance?' I came forward, and stood beside his daughter. He stretched out a feeble hand to me. 'Valance, I want you to bear witness I absolve her from her promise.' 'Yes, Sir Richard,' I answered. 'One human being has no right to make laws for another. I can trust my daughter's conscience better than my judgment; let her do what seemeth good to her. She has been a good girl to me, Valance—a good girl.' 'Yes,' I answered him again. 'It pains me to leave her, my little May.' The girl stooped and laid her lips upon the baronet's clammy brow; but she did not speak. 'My little May! I shall meet your

mother in heaven, darling; she will love me there; for she will understand all, all that I saw and did—the reasons—the love. Yes, I shall see her soon; but will my child be lonely?' The white lips parted, and a wail came from the orphaned heart and moaned through the room, 'So lonely! so lonely!" 'Will there be none to take care of my darling? none to comfort her? Valance——' His voice failed; he panted helplessly; his eyes rolled. One of the doctors lingering at the foot of the bed approached, and gave him a revivant. 'You must not talk,' he said. 'I must; the time is short. Valance.' I stretched my hand to him; I bent close, and asked him what he wished. Lady Brooklyn, who had been sobbing and moaning all through, here went into violent hysterics, and had to be borne away by the nurse and doctor. The baronet seemed to have forgotten her existence till her screams startled him. 'Poor Eliza!'

he muttered, 'poor Eliza!' 'What do you wish me to do?' I asked again. 'Is there anything you wish to tell me? Rest assured your wish shall be sacred to me.' He tried to speak, but his tongue clove to his teeth. He turned his eyes from me to the sweet girl-face near his own; then feebly—feebly he took my hand, and laid it on his daughter's. She did not start at the contact; she did not look at me. Her eyes were fixed upon the face so soon to be hidden from her. The baronet tried to speak—struggled, but no sound came. I bent down; we both bent down to try and catch the inarticulate murmur, 'Take care of her.' Then, after another struggle, 'Kiss me, Maizie.' She kissed him, and held her cheek pressed against his face during the brief death-struggle that ensued. Other girls would have shrunk away at such a time. She never moved nor loosed her loving embrace till the light went out of the old man's eyes,

and his head sank back; then she fainted. I took her in my arms and bore her away; away out of the darkened room where she had watched and sorrowed so patiently; away down the dim passage and stairs where her light free steps had so often trod; into the old school-room where she and I had sometimes sat together on the long sunny afternoons—the happiest hours of my life—to read strange German legends and tit-bits of the old French authors. I don't know why I brought her there. I had nothing to lay her down on but a little leather couch. How fair she looked lying there; her beautiful golden hair rough and tangled from nights and days of neglect, spreading over the dark pillow in careless, rich profusion; her white young face with an expression of profound sadness and fatigue upon its soft, childish features. O, my darling! my darling! how my heart went out to you! what impotent, mighty yearnings! what

floods of passionate tenderness! what strange, ecstatic bindings of my soul with thy soul! I knelt by her side. Her swoon was so long, I began to wonder if God had seen fit to re-unite already the spirits of father and child. I laid my hand on her heart; it still beat low and flutteringly. I bowed my head on her hands—her quiet, restful hands, and I dared not pray that she might not die; I dared not pray that she might not pass away as she lay there in the cold, grey light. It would be better for her; who could doubt but that it would be better for her? What had earth to offer her but sorrow and loneliness? sorrow from which my hand would be powerless to shield; loneliness from which I should be doomed to hang aloof. My love for her had long, long passed the selfish stage. I felt I could give her to God to hold and to keep, if so be that it would be better for her. No word of mine should clutch her back from restful happiness to

restless pain. I did not clasp my hands, lest the angels might mistake the gesture for prayer. I held my breath that my sighs might not hinder the flight of her spirit. I gave her up; the costliest sacrifice that was ever laid on the altar of undying love. The red light of the rising sun came flushing through the window, and fell upon her face and hands. Was it a token from heaven that the offering was accepted? Had the fire of God's approval smitten the sweetest, dreadest oblation ever man made? We have these fantastic thoughts in moments of feeling's highest tension. I was terribly over-wrought and over-excited. Nothing would have appeared to me impossible or incredible. If a troop of white-winged angels with wreaths and viols had gathered round the little couch, I should not have held it strange. If I had seen them bear my darling away towards the rosy sky, far, far away, till distance had stolen the colour

from her hair—the contour of her face, I should not have wondered; I should have laid my head where her head had last rested, and wept tears of belief and bereavement. 'And God called to Abram.' What a wild revulsion for the brave old patriarch, with his knife raised ready to slay his all! 'Do the lad no hurt.' Ah! who can picture his rapturous clasping of that rejected sacrifice; that re-given joy? Only those who have had their heart's dearest restored by a gracious God; only those of us who have unwound the bleeding fibres of the heart one by one from its treasure, and held it out on prayer-stretched hands towards the heavens; held it there till a voice was heard from among the cherubims, bidding us relay it in our bosom. O, Voice from beyond the stars! O, gracious rejection, softer than the night dews. 'The joy is thine, *thine* to clasp and cling to; thine to hold to thy riven heart; thine all the more because of this

second giving; thine by royal right of selfless love.' The dawn-flushed eyelids quivered, then opened, and a pair of great grey eyes, sweeter than any dawn, looked into mine, puzzled at first, and dreamy. Ah! how piteous to watch the gradual consciousness of loss, and loneliness creep into them. Loss that I could not repair—loneliness that I dared not comfort. I moved away from her side, and her eyes greeted the ruddy morning sky. She would find more hope in its warm rich glow than in my face, I thought; and I hid myself from her. Presently I heard her voice speaking calmly and sweetly, as it had often come to me through the open window, as she talked with her father in the garden, on the summer-mornings. 'And there shall be no more pain, neither sorrow nor crying; neither shall there be any more death.' Then a silence. Then a muffled cry. A lonely frightened cry, as of a child wakened

suddenly, to find itself alone in the dark. 'Father! father! why did you not take me with you? Father—father—' She got up off the sofa, and staggered across to the window, then half-fell, half-knelt on the floor, stretching out her arms towards the morning sky. 'I want to go! I want to go!' I tried to think of something to say to comfort her, and soothe the bitterness of her sudden desolation. Some Bible words; some of the old quieting assurances that have eased so many aching hearts; but the immense pity; the fathomless tenderness that welled in my soul would not let me speak. Suddenly she burst into a terrible fit of weeping. She is not one of those cold, weak characters that can weep a few quiet tears with ease and safety. To cry with her is to mourn—to resent—to protest; a storm of emotion rushing through her being, shaking every nerve, agonizing every feeling. It is the sudden writhing of an immortal spirit under the

mortal pressure of unendurable pain. How she moaned, and fought, and cowered! How she sobbed and trembled! What tears! What sighs! I watched her. Exhaustion would supervene, I knew. I waited; her young strength was not soon spent. The turbulent passion of her grief was long in subsiding. The first rays of the newly-risen sun were peering in with careless curiosity, when at last she lay quiet and pale with wet, swollen face, and sobbing breath. I approached. The school-room floor was hard lodging for that dainty head. 'Will you come and lie down?' I asked, bending over her. She raised her head and stretched out her arms; and as I lifted her in my arms, she laid her cheek against my shoulder. I placed her on the couch again, and fetched a pillow for her head. 'I will leave you to sleep,' I said. But she clasped my hand tight. 'Don't go, M. Valance, you are all I have now! don't

leave me!' she murmured; so I remained by her side, and held her hand; and gradually she sank into a deep, deep sleep; the sleep of exhausted powers, mental and physical. I rose then. I laid her little white hand upon her heaving breast, and stole away. It is evening now, and I have not seen her since. They told me she slept for five hours without stirring. She has kept to her room since. Her step-mother has been with her for a short time. I suppose I shall see her to-morrow. In the meantime I must be making out my duty. My mind is calm, my brain is clear. What mode of action should I adopt; which course of procedure is the best. O, for a guide! I cannot leave; certainly, not till I can leave her happy, and secure in her happiness. She has been confided to my care, by both her father and her mother. Strange fate! Inexplicable Providence! Hush! I will not name it thus; rather let me say the inscru-

table working of a merciful God, who can see the end from the beginning; who needeth not that any man should tell Him, watching from the heights of unapproachable majesty the whole of these, His human creatures' lives, and fashioning them according to His will, in the "Armies of Heaven." My duty is to be faithful to my trust. My sole wish, to render her happy. I cannot decide on any fixed plan; but I shall endeavour to disentangle my life from hers. Not that I shall ever cease to watch over and protect her, if the width of the world separates us.

CHAPTER V.

"Voici l'instant suprême—l'instant de nos adieux."

PARTING.

A MONTH has passed since the baronet's death. His daughter and his wife and son are still at Castle Grange, where they will continue to live till Maizie is of age. Sir Richard has left his wife and step-son comfortably off, but the bulk of the property he has bequeathed to Maizie. On attaining the age of one-and-twenty she will be possessed of the Castle Grange estate, with a revenue of fifteen thousand a year.

Lady Brooklyn has dismissed her son's tutor; he leaves Castle Grange to-morrow. By-the-bye he will not find it necessary to continue the arduous profession of teaching,

for a codicil was found in Sir Richard's will, leaving M. Valance, "his true and valued friend," the sum of a thousand pounds, "as a small token of his regard and esteem for the same."

A newly-married couple, a certain Dr. and Mrs. King, are expected to-morrow; the former being one of Maizie's earliest friends. He has only just returned from his wedding tour in Italy; and hearing of the death of Maizie's father, he has written to ask if he might come and see her, "the little girl he had romped with so often in the dear old days." Maizie's answer was a warm and pressing invitation, seconded by her stepmother; to-morrow, therefore, she will experience a meeting and a parting.

Life is a curious mixture of gain and loss, of grasping and foregoing. Doubtless there is the Divine law of compensation in this also. Leave go of one pleasure, and here—here is another almost before the tears of

bereavement have time to start. If we could only hold things loosely. If we could only learn the great lesson that life is so constantly teaching us—to part easily and to meet gladly; to leave and to welcome; to-day to behold for the last time; to-morrow to greet for the first time, and so onward—never looking back; never taking too firm a grasp of these fleeting treasures, these vanishing friends. Alas! for clinging human hands. Alas! for yearning human hearts. Alas! for the backward glances. Alas! for the irresistible sweetness that clings to the past, and the vanished. "It is gone," say desolated lips; "it is gone, but I shall never cease to lament it; it is gone, but my heart and love go with it. I can never care for aught as I have cared for this; I shall never forget it. The possession of it has brightened my life thus far; the loss of it will darken my journey to the grave."

This is the language of us short-lived

creatures, whose best, and perhaps only chance of happiness is to enjoy the present. It is, indeed, vain to imagine it could be otherwise. These souls of ours fashioned for Eternity! How fill them with the joy of the hour or day? They cannot be so satisfied; their aspirations and regrets, stretching forwards and backwards, proclaim a limitless capacity. These lives of ours are so short, so pitifully brief, that the two great soul-tendrils, Memory and Hope, clasp the whole from end to end, and still cry out for more.

Maizie is a good deal changed since her father's death. Her girlishness has left her prematurely. The eagerness of childhood has passed away from hand and lip. Her cheek is paler. To-night it is very pale. Self-control is written on her brow; and in her eyes the sad wisdom of one who no longer misunderstands her pain. She has looked into her heart and seen what is there. She is no longer a child, nor even a girl. She

is a woman, crowned with the dumb, terrible sorrow of a woman's worst suffering: a love hopeless, helpless, unconquerable, unchangeable; whose root is anguish and whose flower is bitterness. There is no longer any protest in it; there is scarcely passion. The yearning has sunk too deep; the solemn, defiant yearning that comes but once in a life to any woman; that never comes at all to some. The soul does not die, nor does the soul's love. Both are immortal; to both there is a destiny, either a heaven or a hell.

Maizie Brooklyn is no coward. She has looked her destiny in the face. She could pray against it once; she could beg for a reprieve; she could cling; she could implore; but that was when she did not know what she was asking; that was before she understood her heart. *Now* there is no appeal; now the honour of her sisterhood renders her speechless; now, no detaining word must be uttered; no arresting hand be

raised. Maizie is no coward; she tells herself the truth:

"I love him; life without him will be death; a long, lingering cruel death for the rest of my years. I shall die when I part from him; but I shall die without a groan—women die so every day. I will not be weaker than the rest."

She will not be weaker than the rest; but she will suffer a thousand times more. It cannot be helped, this horrible inequality in human pain. The more alive we are, the more we suffer. Perhaps it will be made even in the next world; it never can here; for though capacity for pain means the same as capacity for joy, yet in what life does the unhappiness not outweigh the happiness?

M. Valance has been dining with Maizie and her step-mother, at the latter's particular request. The poor man would be so lonely, the last night. He had been very good to Louis. She would insist on his coming to

dinner and spending the evening in the drawing-room. So she told Maizie; and Maizie had said: "Very well." And when she went to dress herself for dinner, the knowledge that the pair of eyes whose approval she cared most for of any in the world would rest upon her to-night, influenced her unconsciously in her choice of dress and ornament. Even Lady Brooklyn's dull eyes lit up with mild admiration as her step-daughter entered the drawing-room, clad in a long robe of soft, filmy black, out of which her neck and arms gleamed with an almost unearthly fairness. Some of her bright-hued hair was twisted as a coronet round her head; the rest fell loose below her waist. A diamond brooch, her sole ornament, shone lucid as a star upon her breast.

"My dear, you are very lovely," said her ladyship, complacently. "What with your face and your fortune, you ought to make the most brilliant match imaginable."

Maizie had answered nothing. She did not care to dash her mother's hopes. She might (O, God, the relief!) be dead before next season; past disappointing anybody; past all the inexpressible pain of living on from day to day.

M. Valance talked well during dinner. He contrived to interest even Lady Brooklyn. Maizie became alert and roused, as she always did when her mind was brought into play with the tutor's They forgot about the parting on the morrow; these two whose whole world was in each other; they forgot it in the light and warmth of talk and nearness. They are remembering it now as they stand by the red-burning fire in silence, while Lady Brooklyn slumbers peacefully in her favourite arm-chair.

"I am going from her to-morrow," thinks the tutor. "I should like to feast my eyes on her beauty, to-night; but I dare not; she does not care for me as much as I feared (or hoped, God forgive me!) I want to find out how

much 'sorry' she is to lose me; yet I don't know if I ought to try."

"I wish I could look at him without his seeing me," thinks the other; "I know his face so well; yet this is the last time."

"Shall we have some music?" proposes M. Valance, aloud. "Will you sing or play something?"

"What shall it be?"

"Anything you like. Shall I ring for the candles?"

"No; the lamp gives sufficient light. I shall not attempt anything very elaborate."

M. Valance opens the piano, and lingers near Maizie when she seats herself.

"I shall not require your assistance," she says, as her slender hands touch the keys. "I know all my prettiest things by heart: there will be no leaves to turn."

She feels as though nerves and heart would fail with him by her side; her hands lose their steadiness; her eyes their vision.

The tutor bows, and retires to an obscure corner. She cannot see him. She commences playing. What has got into her fingers to-night? Why does every note they strike sound like a wail? She leaves off the Andante she is playing, and tries a gay little Chanson. No matter; still the wail; more modulated, more hidden, but still there, creeping out in unexpected turns and falls.

"How did you like that?" she asks, when it is finished, peering round the room in search of her hidden auditor.

"Rather melancholy, wasn't it?" says a voice from the dim corner.

Maizie gives a half-laugh.

"Melancholy? It's the gayest little piece I have!" she asserts.

"Try your saddest then."

"No; you play something now; it's your turn."

M. Valance comes obediently out of his shadowy corner to the piano, and Maizie

rises and saunters away to the fire. She seats herself on a low stool, and leans her arms on the sofa near her. M. Valance plays something. She does not hear it consciously; her thoughts are making too much noise. Lady Brooklyn wakes up, imbibes some tea; and then, after declaring she has a headache and must go to bed three successive times without meeting with any response or condolence, she rustles over to Maizie, gives her a kiss, and waddles out of the room. M. Valance neither hears nor sees her ladyship's departure. He goes on playing, and gradually his playing penetrates into the stormy, restless atmosphere of Maizie's consciousness. It is wondrously sweet and soothing. She listens to it, wrapt and attentive, as though to some strange new tale. On—on it steals; never loud, never harsh; murmuring, imploring, assuring, dying away always just as it seems about to utter the core of all its sweetness;

trying to tell it by hints and half whispers, and a word here and there, and then glancing away from it, to talk in even under tones of brooks and trees and moonlit-flowers; to return anon by a swift, sweet note, expressive as the sudden meeting of lovers' eyes. Presently the key changes, the movement is quicker, chords follow each other in agitated succession; the sweetness is almost lost; almost, not quite; there is still a vague echo, twisted and hurt, of the unuttered secret—still an echo; then amongst the trouble and the change and the harshness, a sudden flash, an exquisite turn. Maizie catches her breath. The music stops.

"Don't stop! don't stop!" she moans, imploringly. "You have not finished it. I want to hear it all."

M. Valance gets up and comes towards her. "That is all," he answers. "It ends rather abruptly, does it not? It was composed by a friend of mine, a young German.

He is dead. I fancy he would have made a name had he lived."

"What is it called?"

"The piece? O, that's a little thing in imitation of Mozart's 'Songs without Words.' He called it 'Hidden Love.'"

"Play something more."

"It is getting late. Lady Brooklyn has gone to bed, I see."

"She has a headache."

"What shall I play?"

"I don't care."

"Shall I play the answer to 'Hidden Love?'"

"Is there a sequel? Yes, do."

M. Valance returns to the piano. It is a moment or two before he can recall the melody he wants. Maizie's thoughts are again wandering in weary circles of doubt and grief, when a clear, sweet air sounds through the room; clear and sweet, but how heartbreaking in its utter unalloyed sadness!

There is no demand, no passion; only the despairing unfolding of a deathless love, in its calm, sweet phrases of distinct, unbroken melody. There is no agitation, no pleading; the sadness is a hopeless sadness; the love, one that has grown in sorrow too deep for strife; too utterly real to waste itself in wild complaint; too simple in its greatness to do aught but tell its tale for the last time. It must be for the last time, there is such a solemn stillness in the notes; the chords are heavy with "nevermores;" the lingering pauses between are suggestive of failing breath. The last time! Of course it is the last time. Maizie has heard those words at the close of every cadence like a refrain—*the last time! the last time!* It dies away at length, and there is a silence. The lamp is burning low. It is approaching midnight.

"Well," utters the tutor, enquiringly.

No answer. Perhaps Maizie is asleep. No; the wide, grey eyes are gazing wakefully

enough into the dying fire. The tutor stands beside her.

"Did you like the sequel?" he asks, softly.

"It sounded like a farewell," murmurs the girl.

"It is a farewell," he answers.

"Is it called so?"

"It is called 'Parting; or, Love Revealed.'"

"Did your German friend compose it also?"

"Yes; do you like it?"

"It is a beautiful air, but so sad, so very, very sad."

"Parting is sad, is it not?"

The great eyes dilate as with sudden intolerable pain, and a thrill as of vexed nerves, shoots through the soft, recumbent figure.

"Tell me about your friend. He must have suffered to compose so. Tell me about his life."

"His life was sad enough, for he loved a

woman to whom he dared not speak of love. His death was happy, for his dying ears received the confession of this woman's love for him."

"Why dared he not tell her of his love?"

"She was above him in rank and fortune; he was penniless and a peasant, she a princess and an heiress."

"And she loved him all the time?"

"Yes, her heart had been breaking for him in his poverty. One look, one sign, would have been enough; but he never gave it, till he lay a-dying on her bosom."

"He must have been very proud."

"It was for her sake he was silent."

"For her sake" (a great light of sorrowful indignation blazing in the beautiful eyes)! for her sake! How would it have injured her to hear him tell his love?"

"He did it for the best," says the tutor, almost humbly. "He thought she did not care for him. If he had been convinced she

did not, he would have spoken, I believe; as it was, he loved her too well to drag her down to his level."

"He loved her too well to make her happy," answers Maizie, bitterly. Her heart is sore for this sister who suffered causelessly the horrible pain she is suffering of a necessity. "He loved her too well to bring her down to the warm, green level by his side, the only level where she could be happy, so he left her alone to perish of cold and starvation on the glittering snow-heights of rank and wealth!"

"He did it for the best," repeats M. Valance defiantly.

Maizie has risen, and they stand confronting each other. He can see her white bosom rising and falling in the dimness, her fair cheeks flushed and heated, her eyes flashing and wide.

"He did it for the best, and their pain is all over now; they have been dead for years. She only survived him a week."

"Death was kinder to her than her lover."

"It is all over now."

"She must have suffered."

"Earthly love is not omnipotent."

"Earthly love is very cruel."

"I pity him the most; he had to choose his sorrow. His life must have been a long struggle."

"I pity her the most; she could not even give her sorrow a name. Her life must have been a daily dying."

"Well, well, they are both at rest long ago; they do not want our pity, either of them."

"What was her name, this princess who loved so well and truly?"

"Theckla! She was a German like her lover."

"Poor Theckla—poor Theckla!" repeats Maizie, in tones of profoundest, sorrowfullest compassion.

When one's own grief is so enormous as to be beyond pity and even comprehension,

there is sometimes a strange relief experienced in compassionating its counterpart in dead or fictitious characters. The soft, regretful sentiment of sympathetic remorse easies the strained, astonished heart, cramped and stifled with the burden of its new inconceivable sorrow. It prevents total suffocation—total collapse. To sigh, one must still be alive. Compassion is sometimes a saving sentiment.

"Theckla is dead, I tell you," says M. Valance with pained ferocity.

It hurts him in his present highly-strung mood to hear the sweet, low woman's voice that is about to pass out of his life caressing another name than his. Very ridiculous and unreasonable, no doubt; but who is reasonable and dignified in moments of extremest agony?

"Dead!—happy Theckla!" ejaculates the sweet voice; and this time there is no compassion, only a pitiful thrill of envy in its soft tones.

M. Valance, listening, feels the sickening sensation of a terrible dread stealing over him.

"You are too young to speak like that," he stammers; "you, whose life lies before you, bright and long as a summer's day. You have no right to talk of death as a boon —it is wrong!"

"A summer's day! then I think it must be evening, for I feel cold and weary."

"But it is not evening, it is not even noon yet; these are shadows of morning that are cool about you. Shadows that the noon-sun of love and happiness will soon disperse."

"Only morning," (below her breath) "*only morning*—"

M. Valance catches the scarcely uttered whisper. His senses are preternaturally alive—strung to a fearful keenness by the wild strain of a long-hidden, long-contested agony. He seizes her hands; the small white hands that have grown so strange to him during the last month.

"Child! child!" he cries, in tones of pitifullest pleading, hardly knowing what he says, "I want to make you happy. Where has all your lightness and brightness gone? I would lay down my life to win back the smile to your lips. You are so changed—so saddened—I can hardly believe it is you sometimes—my gay girl pupil. Tell me any wish you have, any desire, and I will work heaven and earth to obtain it for you."

Maizie takes her hands from his, and turns coldly away.

"Is there nothing I can do for you—nothing?" murmurs the tutor, passionately.

"Nothing, thank you, M. Valance" (keeping her face averted and speaking in a quiet voice, as if she were talking in her sleep); "it is getting late, I will say good night."

"You are not sorry I am going; you do not wish me to remain as you did before?"

"No!"

"You are not sorry?"

"Yes! I think I am sorry; I'm very tired. Good night."

She inclines her head, and moves away a step or two.

"You have not said good-bye."

"Good-bye!"

"Will you not shake hands?"

He is by her side, holding out his hand; she puts hers into it, shivering from head to foot. Self-command is hard to win; a great oppression is upon her, like the heavy hush of approaching dissolution. Only her *will* prevents her falling at his feet in a swoon. He holds her clammy death-cold hand in both his. Face and eyes are hidden from him.

"Good-bye! good bye."

She hears the repeated word sigh through the room; the saddest word that earthly love can know. She feels his hands relax their hold—the hands she will never clasp again. She hears a sudden catching of his breath,

half-sob, half-sigh. She hears steps receding from her. She hears the door open and shut; and then the tall, lithe figure, clothed in black, standing all alone in the darkened room, totters suddenly, throws out its arms, and falls helplessly on the ground, with a dull thud. Silence follows.

CHAPTER VI.

"He could not speak to her—no strong beseeching
Could ever have conveyed that piteous gaze
Of mute, deep passion in its mighty reaching,
Which seemed its tower of eloquence raise;
And her whole passionate love without disguise,
Spoke out at last from those poor weary eyes."

Bernard Smith.

HEART TO HEART.

What will you have? We all suffer. If the chapters in this story are more often sad than gay it is because the author has not a powerful imagination. Happiness is hard to paint. Who can draw naturally what they have never seen? Who can sing a strain in a tune they have never heard? The echo, the hint, the vague hues of a morning dream, these are not sufficient. There is a weak note in my viol; I dare not linger on it, or its sound would fail. It is not the key-note to the

melody of this life, yet I often hear its clear thrilling tone vibrating round me. It is called joy, and occurs oftenest as an accidental. The effect is particularly beautiful when it is sounded in the cadence of a melody in a minor key. Dear reader, accept my apologies for the absence of its bright tone in the foregoing pages, and allow me to express a hope that in your life its echo may never die, but be caught up and sustained as the key-note of the *other* life whose melody flows to the rhythm of eternity.

We will pass over the night that followed the farewell of these two hearts that loved each other. There is an agony that neither groans nor tears can express. There are hours and minutes portioned out to some, of more than mortal suffering. Hours and minutes of fire and blood, snatched from the lowest hell, and thrust in amongst the calm of earthly nights and days. Over these things the terror of a great darkness broods ; a dark-

ness that may be felt, not uttered, nor penetrated. We will pass over that night.

The pale, dreary dawn of a December's day is in the sky now. It is already six o'clock. M. Valance has finished his packing, and is leaning out of his window into the murky light of struggling day. Cold drops of sleety rain fall on his face; a chill, raw wind pushes away the dark, thick hair from his forehead, with rough unfriendly fingers, while his large brown eyes look out and away, never flinching, never faltering in their steady, mournful gaze. What is this light upon his face? It cannot be a reflection from that dim pale streak in the east. It is too pure—too radiant. Is it a hint of that brightness, dazzling, majestic, that clothes "those who overcome?" Can it be a faint, faint reflex from the "robes that are white as no fuller on earth can white them?" It may be so. This mystic radiance of triumphal suffering—this strange and tender brightness

of a heart at once broken and victorious. Brave, beautiful face, looking out into the gloom! Saintly, heroic face! All hail! All hail! What matter that the cold rain chills thee—what matter that the rude winds buffet thee. Angels greet thee! God approves thee!

* * * * * *

The tutor moves away from the window. In an hour's time he must be at the station. He must see about his breakfast, and get his portmanteau carried down. He gropes his way down stairs. The dining-room shutters are open, and on the table are two lighted candles. Day-light and night-light are mixed in a dismal struggle for supremacy. M. Valance's breakfast is quite ready, so the man-servant, who is hovering round the table with sleepy eyes and unwashed face, announces. Quite ready, all except the butter—he will fetch that now. He disappears, and M. Valance seats himself, and rises again im-

mediately—paces up and down—looks out of the window. What is this distressing, almost frantic restlessness that has come over him, he wonders? Surely he should be calm enough—he who has nothing to lose, nothing to fear or hope. That last hope! What bliss, what agony! What a hypocrite, what a cowardly hypocrite he had been about it; praying God to take it from him, and then when his prayer had been heard (he knew it would be heard; it was a right prayer, and right prayers are always heard) to wish every minute of the day that he had not prayed it, to wish her love back at any cost—at any price—to wish it back so vehemently that he had knelt to God with dumb lips ever since (lips that should have rendered thanks) lest they should ask back the treasure, the treasure that perhaps he never possessed! That hope was past—God had taken it away at his request. She did not wish him to remain, he had heard her say so with her own lips.

She was not even very sorry he was going. Everything was as he had desired it should be. She had grown too strong and self-contained to need his assistance. He could leave her without fear that she would miss him, or need him. She would marry soon—what a queenly bride she would make! Yes, it was all quite over. Strange that he feels so unsettled—so impatient. His attitude of mind is more like that of a man whose fortunes are hovering in the balance between joy and despair, than one whose fate is fixed, whose life-burden is already strapped on—whose face is already set towards the dim and distant gate of death, as the fairest goal to win. So he wonders on, and in his wondering and restlessness he passes out of the dining-room, along the passage, into the cold dark hall. A thin streak of day-light lying across the oil-cloth floor attracts his notice. He perceives it comes from under the drawing-room door. The shutters must be open; a

sudden desire seizes him to enter the room where last he saw the fair form of the woman he loves—to stand where she stood with bowed head and averted face—to picture her lying against the sofa, with easy, restful grace; as she had lain when she listened to his playing, and argued with him about his dead friend's sweetheart. He opens the door eagerly: the door that was last opened and shut by himself. He opens it noisily and abruptly, as we are apt to open the door of what we suppose to be an occupantless room. It looks very weird and dreary in the dim grey light. Only two of the windows are unshuttered and uncurtained, the other two are still in their attitude of dark defence against the terrors of the night. The piano is open, the stool pushed aside, just as he left it. The lamp is on the table. How still and forlorn it all is! He shuts the door and advances further into the room—O God! O God! what is that thing lying by the window?

that black thing lying stretched and prone and stirless by the window? That wild wealth of wondrous golden hair, spread bright and passive as petrified sunlight—he knows it—he knows—he has seen it so often dancing and quivering in the summer breezes. Now flung over the face—now tossed back. He caught it one day and prisoned it in his hands. How soft it felt! How rare and silky! It does not stir now, it does not move, not a single tress. He has seen hair lie like that once before—only once; but then—but then—a great cry bursts from his lips, a great agonized cry; a cry like that which rang through a certain Paris theatre years and years ago, when murder had been done, and the murdered lay upon the stage.

"Dead! dead! Maizie—Maizie!"

No—not dead—not dead, for she rises at his cry—rises up in the ghostly light, from the hard floor, where she has lain all night in the greatest anguish woman can know—

rises up and looks at him as Lazurus might have looked at his beloved again after his fearful three nights sojourn in the charnel house of death. The beautiful face, white as the struggling daylight, forgets its mask; the great candid eyes, the mute suffering lips, all tell the same tale. The wondrous startling gladness of this revision—this resurrection of a voice and form lost for ever, given up, resigned, through hours of intensest torment, has torn the veil from her sacred woman's heart. It stands revealed in all the bleeding nakedness of its desolated deathless love. Nothing is between them now, this man and woman standing staring at one another in the dim, grey light. Down into each other's soul they gaze. O rare, rare glimpse. O mystic moment when spirits meet and touch. Nothing is between them now! Life and death, what are they but shadows? Earth and heaven, which is which? Nothing can part them now—these hearts throbbing one

upon another. Nothing can part them now, these spirits that have intermingled—always each other's from henceforth, whatever happens. The marriage of souls is indissoluble—eternal; a union which laughs at death; which sorrow and suffering, and distance and despair, only renders more close and more profound. The marriage of souls is indissoluble. Yes, yes—but how about this man and woman, clinging together in a delirious ecstasy of oblivious joy? How about these straining hands—these kissing lips? Can nothing come between *them?* The wrong, and woe, and wrath that surges round them—will the force of these billows not sunder them? The cruel Past, the imperious Future, shall they not wrench away these twined arms and close pressed cheeks?

Fear, always the companion, or rather the mean page that follows a great joy, finds its way first into the woman's heart.

"You will never leave me, never—never?" murmurs Maizie.

No reply, only a wilder straining of those encircling arms—a more defiant throbbing of the exultant heart pressed to hers. The man's whole being, so long held from its destiny, so chained and tormented, so chastened, so subdued, has grasped its rights with such a rush of eagerness, such an agony of joy, it can do nothing but shiver, and pant, and strain. To asseverate is preposterous, to exact is impossible—he has his all!

M. Valance has had a hard life, a cruelly hard life; full of injustice and privation, and disappointments. His has been one of those lives over which misfortune hangs like a doom, inexplicable, relentless; yet if all his past years, all his miserable days and hours were weighed against these few perfect minutes, they would utterly be contemned. This one superb gift more than makes amends for his ruined youth and hopeless manhood. This one grand fruition for all his wasted dreams; this one sweet reality for a thousand

faded visions. It is so seldom, so very very seldom, that a heart loving as his loves, meets with love in return. Such bliss is commonly reserved for heaven; were it frequent, men would be apt to forget their eternal Abode, or misname their temporal. They are silent, silent as the coming day that brightens round them, and as far above the earth and its affairs as the calm white clouds sailing in the dim morning sky. They will need a shock to bring them back to this dull, low life. One is preparing already; carriage wheels are crunching on the drive; already the sharp clack of a whip cuts the stillness; then a ring at the door—the tramping of feet—the talking of many voices—opening and shutting of doors. They do not stir—they do not hear. Their trance of happiness is too deep. The fever of their rapture too high. Outward senses grow dull and sluggish when the inward life is blazing thus fiercely. The door of the drawing-room is opened, opened

widely. Ah! why could they not be left in peace a little longer? The great world is so full, so busy, surely it might have spared these two to each other a little longer. But no, it is only grief that is left lonely, happiness is always intruded upon. The door opens widely. Two figures are standing on the threshold, and a doomful voice rouses M. Valance from the first and only joy he has ever experienced.

"Bertram! Bertram Messeter," it says.

He has not time to spring forward. He has not time to lay his hands upon that cruel mouth, before they are seized and wrung by a stalwart light-haired man, whom he recognises as the one he used to love more than any on the earth.

"What Arthur, Arthur Marble!"

"Alias Dr. King, old fellow—O Berty, how have we missed each other all these years?"

"I have not spared any pains to find you; I have searched the world for you."

The doomful voice that called him first speaks again.

"And I for you."

The two men turn towards the owner of the voice; a tall, richly-dressed lady, with a dark, superbly handsome face—a face M. Valance knows, as he knows the lowering thunder cloud sailing up against the wind through the stormless blue of a summer sky,

"Allow me to introduce you to my wife," says the doctor, with a rather nervous laugh, "I believe you have met her before."

Despite the awkwardness of the situation, he cannot help directing a whimsical look of mock inquiry towards his friend. Dr. Marble was always one of those individuals to whom the comic side of life is visible rather than the tragic.

"Yes, we have met before," interposes Mrs. King, returning M. Valance's bow with a haughty inclination of her head. "We have met before, but M. Messeter's memory is fortunately a short one."

"Messeter," gasps Maizie, who has vainly been trying to make head or tail of this strange renewing of old acquaintance; "his name is not Messeter."

"What is it then?" asks Dr. King's Cleopatra-like bride, turning sharply to the beautiful fair-haired girl, with milk-white arms and neck.

"M. Valance, of course!" answers Maizie defiantly, her grey eyes lightening a little at her visitresses tone.

Dr. King comes to the rescue! "Ha, ha, this is like the fifth act of a melo drama. We're all finding out each other's real names. It is really quite exciting. My dear little Maizie" (turning to the girl and shaking her hand heartily), "pray excuse my not noticing you before. This M. Valance, as you call him, is one of my oldest and dearest friends. I cannot say how unutterably glad I am to meet him again. Take my wife up-stairs will you, there's a dear, she's tired out. By-the-

bye, I've never introduced you; allow me, Miss Brooklyn, Mrs. King."

What a contrast they make, these two beautiful stately women. They form a tableau that a theatrical manager would give hundreds to be able to place upon his boards, as they bow to each other. Such superb hauteur! Such graceful animosity! The two men looking on, not being theatrical managers, are perhaps unable to appreciate the effect; for as the door closes upon the two fair performers, they stand gazing at one another in dumb concern.

CHAPTER VII.

"Love's sweet once tasted, from thenceforth
The bitterest possible pang that future life
Can hold in store, the most implacable wrath
Of hostile fortune, is too slight a thing to be accounted aught."

A RE-MEETING.

"We came at rather an inopportune moment, eh, Bertram?" asks Dr. King, passing his fingers uneasily through his thick brown beard (he has grown the hairy appendage, so called, since we saw him last), and looking askance at M. Valance, who has turned abruptly from him and sunk down in a chair, leaning his forehead in his hands.

No answer.

Dr. King repeats the question in a more facetious form. "You and Maizie weren't exactly waiting for us, eh, old fellow?"

The great dark eyes look up with almost as much bewildered pain as the doctor remembers to have seen in them of old. The tutor cannot name his fear yet; it is too ugly, too ghastly. He will speak of his friend's concerns; it is easier.

"She loves you now?" he asks.

"Juliet, you mean? Well, yes, she likes me" (wincing a little) "better than any one else, she says."

"And you are happy?"

"Very happy."

M. Valance (we will call him by his assumed name still; it will save trouble) gets up, and holds out both his hands. "I'm so glad," he says, "dear old Arty."

"And you, Bertram; and you?" asks the other with glistening eyes.

"You have not yet told me why you have changed your name," says M. Valance, enquiringly.

"Oh, that's soon told. A certain Dr.

King, of a large practice and renown, took a fancy to me. He was a distant connection. We entered into partership; he died, and I took his name. I'm a rich man: Dr. King, of 2, Portland Crescent, Bath, at your service."

"Did you never think it would be next to impossible for me to find you under that name?"

"My dear fellow, it's only since the last two years that I have assumed it. We had long given up hopes of ever seeing you again."

"We?"

"Aye; Juliet and myself. What have you been doing all these years? Begin at the beginning, and tell me all that has happened since."

"Since my escape from——"

"Hush; the walls have ears."

"Doubtless Juliet has told you the last she saw of me: fleeing away into the night.

Well, I could not stop my horse; it seemed possessed. The frightful speed almost stunned me. I was a second Mazeppa. On and on we flew over the rough, lonely waste. I know not for how long, nor how far. Something glimmered before me, white and solid. My fate, I called it. We made straight for it. I had a whip still in my hand. I raised it, and struck the maddened brute that was carrying me to my death, again and again. I was delirious. I wished to hasten the end. My horse cried out—screamed like a human being in direst pain, and rushed at the massive object. I was not killed. I cannot tell you how I escaped; I never knew. My steed lay on the ground with its brains dashed out. I arose unhurt. Death had passed me by. It was the stone wall of some yard which stopped my horse's career. I found I was near a village; probably the village Juliet had mentioned, for I could hear the sullen roar of the waves. I made

the best of my way down to where I saw lights glimmering. But I will cut it short. I hate details. I sailed that night in the *Merchantman*, which, by the way, was not a merchantman at all, but a pirate. The men on board—a rough, desperate set—were only too glad to enlist my services. We were wrecked on some islands near the Gold Coast, and were picked up by a vessel bound for New Zealand; at least, two of us—the only surviving two. My fortune turned at this point. I found friends; I obtained appointments. I rose from clerk to be foreman of a large business house. As soon as I had the time and means, I set sail for France. I searched for traces of my old friend all over Paris, but found no clue—no thread to his whereabouts. I made enquiries about a family of the name of Marble in Yorkshire, but was told the old people were dead, and the young scattered over the world."

"What year was that in?"

"Sixty-eight."

"Ah, both my parents died the year before that; my three brothers—one is dead, and two are stationed out in India. Maizie Brooklyn was at school, and I at Bath. Good God, how easily people lose sight of each other in this big world! And then what did you do?"

"I returned to New Zealand, gave up my situation there, and went in for study. I became assistant master at a school, and, lastly, professor of the French language, also competent to teach mathematics, drawing, and elocution. I taught in various families. Two years ago I entered the services of Sir Richard Brooklyn, then in Italy with his wife and her son, to whom I was tutor and nurse as well sometimes, for the lad was delicate."

"You never thought of returning to the stage?"

"No, never" (whitening and shuddering like wind-blown water); "never."

"And your talents—your genius—all lost; what a thousand pities!"

Silence.

"Berty, Berty, you have had a hard life; a ruined, disappointed life."

The wealthy doctor takes a seat by the tutor, and lays a condoling hand upon his shoulder. M. Valance shakes it off almost rudely, and turns a pair of steady, gleaming eyes upon his friend—eyes that do more than reject his pity—eyes in which a grand scorn of compassion shines and glows.

"I have conquered my life; I have subdued my misery; I have vanquished my despair; and now my pain has turned to joy. God has given me a rich gift, which would have been a rich gift even in the other world; which would have been rapture enough to feed the happiness of eternity. Oh, Arthur, help me to bear this rare and

wonderful bliss; teach me how to be thankful. My heart is breaking beneath this new gladness!"

M. Valance has lost sight of the fear that appalled him a moment since. The triumphant waves of his joy have broken loose, and whelmed it for the nonce.

"Does she love you? Does she really love you, Bertram?" asks Dr. King, earnestly.

"Hush! we *belong* to each other. I cannot speak of it; it is so fresh, so strange!"

"Not strange at all," says the doctor, practical as of yore. "Do you know you are a remarkably handsome man? I remember long ago the ladies found you irresistible; *now* you are a thousand times more dangerous than ever, with that great moustache and those understanding eyes; those lines, too, upon your forehead and round your mouth, they are unutterably fascinating, for they speak of past vicissitudes. Your face is a romance, in fact; and women love

romances. By-the-by, she has a little fortune, by all accounts."

"Yes" (passionately); "I wish she hadn't a penny."

"Nonsense, man; you were always too romantic. The good things of this life are not to be despised."

"I wish to God! Sir Richard had willed his fortune otherwise."

"How old is she?"

"Eighteen next July."

"Humph! quite old enough to know her own mind. Does Lady Brooklyn approve?"

"Lady Brooklyn knows nothing of it. Lady Brooklyn has nothing to say to it."

"True, true; of course she hasn't. I hope they will get on all right together."

"They?"

"My wife and your—and Maizie."

The doctor gets up, and paces uneasily up and down. M. Valance is silent; the horrid serpent *fear* has stolen into his heart again,

and is whispering dreadful suggestions to him.

"I almost wish we had postponed our visit till things were a little more settled," utters Dr. King, musingly.

"How long do you intend to stay?"

"Only a few days."

"Arthur" (getting up, and facing his friend with earnest, troubled eyes), "will you forgive me if I ask a strange thing of you; a thing that will sound unkind and unfriendly?"

"Ask what you will, Berty; it shall be done if it is in my power."

"It is that you and your bride leave this house to-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"Forgive the request; pity the fear that prompts it. Arthur, think of my past life; remember the woman who ruined it."

"Remember the woman who rescued you," retorts the new-made husband.

M. Valance takes no notice of the interruption; he goes on pleading: "How can I help not being sure that she will not try and mar this new life; that she will not somehow dim this beautiful joy? Oh, Arthur, I dare not risk it. I will not endure the terror, the suspense——"

"Hush! I understand you" (Dr. King's manly face pales a little); "and though I hope—think your apprehension is causeless, we will be on the safe side; I will find some excuse. I will contrive some urgency that will necessitate our leaving this to-morrow."

M. Valance seizes the honest hands that have ministered to so many ailments and soothed so many death-bed pangs, and wrings them, while great tears of sheer relief stand in his dark eyes.

"I cannot thank you, Arthur. What a coward happiness has made of me! I could stand outside my Paradise for months, and never ask to enter; I could even turn away

at length to leave it for ever—should have done so had not God opened the gate Himself; but now—now that I stand *inside*, every breath that stirs the scent-laden air strikes a chill through me, for fear it may be the beginning of a storm, or a whisper to bid me leave my joy!"

"What an excitable fellow you are, Bertram. Never mind! these vague terrors will vanish when you are married. I remember I myself was not quite comfortable till I had placed that plain gold ring on Juliet's hand."

Quite comfortable! God help his trusting, guileless heart! God help his single, steadfast nature!

"How did you meet her again? What has she been doing since?"

"She gave up that—that business in ——— after you left. She came to Paris, and resumed her stage career. She has been greatly run after; in fact, a brilliant success."

"Has she given up acting now?"

"Yes, entirely."

"At your request?"

"At my request."

"It must have been hard for her to give it up."

"No; she wanted rest; rest and change, she said."

"Arthur, Arthur, she is not worthy of you."

The words burst forth involuntarily; burst forth like an irresistible wail of indignant pity.

"What do you mean? Not worthy of me! Is that the way you speak of the woman who has twice risked her life for you? who has braved dangers and difficulties from which the strongest man would not have been blamed for shrinking back? Why, man, are you narrow-minded enough to judge the girl from a rash act of passion and jealousy, long since atoned for by truest repentance?"

"I ask your pardon, Arthur. I had no

right to speak so; only no woman short of perfection would seem good enough for you. Juliet has behaved very heroically on many occasions; she has some very good qualities. I feel nothing but kindness towards her. But, oh! when a man's heart has been starved all his life, and is suddenly filled to overflowing, it grows savage and selfish at the slightest hint of its food being snatched from it. It growls and maddens at the touch even of a caressing hand. I have become cantankerous, Arthur. You mustn't mind me."

"Poor old Berty! you have become nothing of the sort; and as for anyone interfering in your 'new life,' as you are pleased to call it, I'll take care of that. Juliet and I will depart to-morrow, and leave the field clear. I shall receive a telegram in the course of the day to summon me to Bath. Mind you condole properly, and express your profound regret, etc. But I need not instruct *you* how to *act!*"

CHAPTER VIII.

"But trust me, no true love there can be without its dread penalty—jealousy."—(*Lucile*).

FACILIS EST DESCENSUS AVERNI.

It is the evening of the same day. The inmates of Castle Grange—viz., Lady Brooklyn and her daughter, Dr. and Mrs. King, and M. Valance, are assembled in the drawing-room, from whence they are about to emigrate, to partake of that social repast dear to Englishmen's hearts, known as dinner. What has the day brought forth? It is not difficult to tell by the faces and attitudes of those present. Maizie—let us look at her first. She is pleasant to look at to-night. Her dress is the same as the preceding evening, but where has her paleness gone? Her

cheeks are rosy with the gorgeous colouring lent by the sudden dawn of life's sun upon her; her eyes great radiant wells of flashing joy; her beautiful mouth, not fixed and saddened as it has been for so many months past, but curving and tremulous as though it longs to speak some gladsome news to the world; her hair, shining, golden, glossy, streaming over her shoulders, and half veiling her burning cheeks and glowing eyes from one who is seated close beside her; so close that a wave of her soft black dress lies across his feet; so close that one of her little hands is nestling in his without fear of detection. And the man who is by her side; the fortunate one favoured by such proximity; let us take a look at him; M. Valance! is it possible? Why what a change joy can make in a man's appearance. Strong, passionate, dark, and pale still; but how those eyes are lightening and melting all in a moment. And the brow: how upraised and glad! How heavy the

weight must have been that subdued it! That free, open brow with the proud, tender light upon it. Watch it bent over the little prisoned hand with the reverent homage of assured possession. Ah! Maizie, Maizie, you are caught at last. You will never be free any more, you beautiful wild bird! The badge of your capture already encircles your little white finger. Such bondage is sweet, you would say with those liquid grey eyes of yours,—only you cannot raise them just now, whilst he gazes so fixedly. There! 'tis a pretty picture; but we must not linger. Allow me to introduce you to a lady who can bow gracefully before the enevitable. Not at all a easy thing to do,—in spite of that dawning sneer I detect on your lips, dear Reader. Mark my words! I said *gracefully*. There she sits in that cosy arm-chair, chatting away to Dr. King, as if nothing more had occurred to ruffle her serenity during the day than perhaps a lost trinket, or a misplaced hair-

pin. And yet Lady Brooklyn has suffered a very severe shock during the last twelve hours of daylight; a shock that took away her breath with surprise, and laid one of her most elaborate air-castles in the dust. From a duke to a tutor. It was a sudden plunge; and then all the pleasant little accompanying honours of the position that she had so often pictured—"My daughter the Duchess used to say so." "My son-in-law, the Duke, has asked me to spend Christmas at his place." All gone at one fell blow! All dispelled by one little sentence spoken by M. Valance as they sat together in her cosy *boudoir*, while he unfolded the tale of his love for her beautiful step-daughter.

"She loves me and I love her."

She knew it was all over then. To try and part two such passionate hearts was something like endeavouring to sever, with her weak, plump hands, metal welded to metal. To tear love from love! This is a task

beyond mortal strength; this is a fact strong as destiny. She bowed before it, did this sensible common-place woman, with a grace and fortitude that were admirable. It is only certain natures that can thus support the inevitable. To some, the little word "must" is maddening, stunning, bewildering, as the sudden apparition of a brick and mortar wall to a runaway horse; or the flaunting of a scarlet flag to an enraged bull. They dash out their life against it; or foam, and kick, and lose their reason in a passion of despair. To others, this inexorable word is accepted only after nights and days of wrestling; only after the heart's rebellion has been wept out in tears of blood. It is to the few—only the very few, that this gift of instantaneous submission is vouchsafed; for it is a gift, and a very costly one—to be able to surrender the citadel of Desire without a murmur, when once the flag of Hope has been removed. To these, comes the blessing

of calmness, instead of despair; healing instead of madness.

Lady Brooklyn rose up; not without a certain dignity, as the tutor spake the devastating sentence. She held out her foolish, ungraceful hand, kindly.

"If this is so, there is then nothing more to be said. Will you excuse my leaving you, M. Valance; for I would seek my daughter; she must be anxious?"

So she left him, and found the fair, queenly girl whom she loved, yet always misunderstood, trying to hide her blushing face in her slender hands, and trembling all over with love and shyness. She put her arm round her and kissed her, and drew the golden head upon her shoulder for the first time. And Maizie knew that her happiness was complete. *Complete?* Shall I dare to write that word when describing human happiness? Yes; it is complete in this sense, that nothing can add to it. It is

complete in another sense; Maizie's heart can hold no more. It is also complete by comparison. It is perfect in its wonderful satisfaction; perfect, as far as we know the meaning of that term. If we may not use it here, then we have no use for it on earth. These human hearts of ours cannot know a higher bliss than this; to love with the whole soul, and to be beloved in like measure.

Maizie and M. Valance are sitting steeped in this bliss; forgetful, intoxicated; neither looking forward nor backward; neither wishing nor regretting; no room for hope, no room for remembrance; the Past, the Future —both darkened; both rendered indiscernable by this sudden rich effulgence of immediate joy! As they sit thus, the door is flung open, and a servant announces the fact of dinner being ready. Dr. King offers his arm to Lady Brooklyn, and her ladyship looks over her lace-covered shoulder, and nods at the tutor.

"M. Valance, will you take in Mrs. King?" she asks.

M. Valance gives one fleeting, yearning look at Maizie, and then rises to offer his arm to his friend's bride. What a ridiculous chill strikes into his betrothed's heart as he does so. What a keen, disappointed pang passes through it. Maizie herself is angry with herself; yet her anger does not dissipate the unreasoning feeling of pained bereavement. She follows her lover and his old friend; the friend who recognised him so immediately, and called him by that strange name — Messeter. How splendidly handsome she is. She would ask M. Valance all about his acquaintance with her after dinner. In the meantime she has to go and take her seat opposite her lover and this splendidly handsome woman who knew him so long ago. She has to see them talking, and not to hear what they say. Mrs. King's voice is peculiarly low and soft; the person she

speaks with is sure to lower his, as hers, by force of sympathy. She has to mark the confidential, meaning flashes of those curiously deep-lashed eyes into his eyes. She has to perceive the interested look coming into his face; the look she knows so well. She has to watch it deepen and grow, till those grand, dark eyes forget to glance across at her, absorbed in contemplation of the wondrously beautiful woman at his side. She has to learn what jealousy means; the sharp sting of the venomous insect that those who pluck the bell-like blossom, Love, can scarce escape. Some, however, are so fortunate as only to feel a prick—a quick, keen pang, over almost as soon as experienced; while others are stung so severely, the venom working inward, poisons the whole moral system. We must not waste our pity upon Maizie, though the joyous flush has left her cheek for awhile, and a darkness crept into her sensitive grey eyes, for the wo-

man who sits opposite her, smiling, beautiful, whose heart is a hideous mass of foul decay, through the insidious eating of the frightful malady (nursed during long years), known as unrequited love, and now, amid these ruins and this crumbling blackness, the fierce agony of an ancient sting is thrilling—an ancient sting that has never ceased to bite and ache, and that now, waking into angry life, shakes the whole of the tortured structure with its feverish throbs.

Juliet King is a perfect actress; perfect in the art of dissimulating—perfect in the art of simulating an emotion contrary to the one which in reality sways her. The full lips smiling a trifle sadly; the deep eyes with a wistful memory in them; the low voice hesitating, dying away, hinting at far more than is expressed in the words it utters: all these are so many *accoutrements* belonging to the disguise it pleases her to wear to-night. She has chosen her *rôle*, and her

unerring dramatic instinct teaches her the suitable bearing for it. She will make one more effort to win this heart that has always turned from her. She will make the effort, despite the dishonour and the shame; despite the horror and inconceivable ruin that must attend its success. She will make the effort because she *must*; because the love that has been her doom holds her again—strongly in its giant grip, and urges her to further destruction.

"At all costs, at all costs!" this terrible tyrant whispers, that rules her body and soul.

There is no such thing as "standing still," in our spiritual life, so moralists tell us. We either grow better or worse. Our progress is either upward or downward. In what direction has the impulsive, passionate girl been progressing since we met her in the first chapter of this tale? She contemplated and planned a crime then—a crime no sooner

planned than executed, no sooner consummated than repented of; a crime that was the ugly froth of a seething ungoverned passion; the madness of a jealous rage. Was it a step upward or downward when she set about winning the young jailor's love with the clear purpose ever present in her mind of making a mere tool of him? Is premeditated murder worse than unpremeditated? Is the cool determination entertained for months to ruin a fellow-creature, body and soul, for one's own ends, worse than the hot impulse that strikes the intervening object from the path that leads to love? I trow not—and alas! the downward career of this wretched soul does not pause, nor retrograde here. Juliet Venini never did a darker deed than when she lied to her true-hearted lover. Her guardian angel, sad and stern, fled away to return no more when the cold world-worn woman laid her false heart on the warm tender heart that had loved her so long and

so truly, and vowed that at last she could return this love—that at last she had found her true resting place, her real home. This last step shewed all the appalling barrenness that had laid waste her once rich nature. The generous feeling, the noble impulse, the kindly affection, all withered and dead. She wanted rest and wealth. She could have it by deceiving a guileless heart—she did not hesitate. Yes, her course has been consistent and undeviating. The degrading influence of uncontrolled passion has been marked by three distinct descents. There remains yet a fourth, and even now she stands upon its brink—even now she looks down into this deeper depth, not with horror, but with fierce longing. The Juliet Venini of old days blundered fatally in her tactics when laying siege to Bertram's heart. The Juliet King that now sits beside him is incapable of a false move or hasty premise. The girl Juliet loved Bertram too passionately to hide the

feeling. The woman Juliet loves him more passionately perhaps, but she is perfectly able to conceal it. The last sentiment to be revealed—the last feeling to be discovered in a woman's heart should be the true one. The actress has learnt this lesson, she has been long in the learning. They say that an art learnt easily is soon forgotten. Juliet has had this lesson stamped upon her memory in letters of blood, through slow years of suffering. Her deep eyes scarcely seek the dark man's face so close to her during dinner. It is M. Valance who turns ever and anon to gaze at the splendour of her sad proud beauty. She knows exactly how often he does so. She feels the old burning thrill when those grand eyes rest upon her. She is telling him all about her success on the stage—her weariness of it—her longing for rest and security. He listens gravely, with a kind of wistful attention. He can hardly realize that she is actually the same woman

who wrecked his life and murdered his friend in the years that are past. She is much improved he tells himself. Her hard life has wrung the black drop from that wilful heart of hers. She evidently still feels the sadness of a deadly remorse. There is an undefined air of utter regret about her—in her movements—her eyes—her mouth—her very tones. His thoughts gradually pass from the early pages of the tragedy enacted by her and himself, and dwell and linger on the strange strong love that followed him in his distress, and never rested till it had rescued him. Where had it all gone to? he wondered. That it *has* all gone he never doubts, for Juliet has taken care that he shall not doubt that. She knows that the way to prevent love is to love. She has begun the siege by rectifying her youth's error in this respect. Bertram Messeter was repelled by her undisguised affection.

M. Valance shall be attracted by her complete indifference. Whether he is attracted or not, he certainly never doubts for a moment that the languid, beautiful actress has entirely got over the wild predilection she bore him in the past. Still he asks himself: "Where has it gone?" He glances at Dr. King's clear, handsome face. No; not there. She likes him very much, of course; but it is with a calm, unimpassioned fondness. There is none of the old mad love he remembers gleaming in her deep, deep eyes as they meet her husband's frank gaze. None. Can love, then, melt, disappear, vanish like the hues of a sunset cloud, or the stars at daybreak? Involuntarily his eyes seek Maizie's for an answer. The great eyes—grey and lucid as a twilit sea; troubled also, as though a storm were brewing in their quiet depths—meet his so full of the helpless yearning of a deathless love, that the mute inquiry stirring within him is

answered and forgotten simultaneously, like the trembling doubt of a dying man, who wakes in heaven amid the glory and the singing of the multitude "which shall go no more out." Juliet follows the straying glance of the dark brown eyes, and watches their meeting with the dark grey eyes she has already learnt to hate. She is about to say something to break the mute communion of the lovers' souls, when the man-servant enters with hasty importance, bearing a large brown envelope on a silver salver, which he presents to Dr. King.

"Hah! a telegram; hope its nothing urgent," ejaculates the wily Doctor, as he tears the missive open. The company remain silent while he peruses it. An expression of well-feigned annoyance clouds his face.

"I hope it is no immediate summons," remarks Lady Brooklyn, courteously.

"Yes, Lady Brooklyn, I'm sorry to say that is exactly what it is," he answers slowly,

as if considering. "How soon could you be able to start to-morrow, Juliet?" he asks, looking enquiringly across at his wife.

"To-morrow, my dear Arthur; to start where?"

"To Bath; one of my patients is dangerously ill; there must be no delay."

"One of your patients? Dr. Wells is at present responsible for all your patients, I thought," says Juliet, looking keenly at her husband's face, whose every turn and change she can read as easily as a child's.

"Yes, yes!" (trying to cover his bewilderment by appearing impatient); "but it is Dr. Wells himself who has telegraphed to me. He has not been attending my patient long enough to understand her complaint; and he begs that I will not hesitate a moment to obey his summons. It is, in fact, a case that admits of no delay. The poor lady's life is not safe from hour to hour."

"Had you not better start at once: to-night?" asks his wife, with the faintest touch of sarcasm in her soft tones.

"I would, only there is no train; but if we start by the eight o'clock express to-morrow, we shall be in Bath about six p.m."

"*We!* You mean to say you want to drag me out at that unearthly hour," remonstrates Juliet languidly.

"Dr. King, if you must go," interposes her ladyship, "why not leave Mrs. King here, and return here yourself when the danger is past, to spend a few days, and take her back?

"Such an arrangement would be impossible —utterly impossible, I regret to say," asserts the Doctor, hurriedly. "I shall not be able to return here; my holidays are already up. Our visit could only at the longest have extended itself over three or four days."

M. Valance, watching Juliet's face, sees a strange half-smile curl the full lip for an instant, as the Doctor speaks.

"What a nuisance," he remarks, thinking that the time has come for him to chime in. "What an utter nuisance that we shall have to lose you just as we have found you! Well, it won't be long before I look you up in your town residence. I know these professional matters cannot be interfered with, so I will say nothing about your disobeying the summons."

"No—no! any neglect of the kind would be serious; it would give rise to damaging reports—it—"

"There is no need to worry yourself, Arthur; nobody wishes to prevent you going; and if you desire it I will be ready to accompany you," says Juliet, with a careless *nonchalance*, toying with a picturesque pear.

"Thank you, dear," utters her husband, directing a grateful, relieved look across the table.

"Allow me to peel that pear for you,"

says M. Valance, politely, taking the said fruit from her lazy, white hands.

Both men are sincerely glad and relieved at her easy acquiescence. Juliet watches the peeling of the juicy fruit from under her black, thick lashes; watches it with steady, furtive persistence. When the skin is off—the harsh, hard "outside"—how easy it is to reach the core. Why, the fork on which M. Valance hands it to her pierces it to the centre. A wild, exultant thrill swells her untamed, unrepentant spirit; a herald of approaching triumph; of a life-long desire crowned; a death-strong love rewarded. She who has braved horrors unspeakable, dangers unprecedented, has now only the will of one man, and that man her husband, to combat. She who has planned and striven and struggled through densest labyrinths of circumstances and thought, has now only to turn down a little by-way; to push aside a few intervening boughs; to hesitate; to play;

to lull all suspicions to rest; and then step forth quietly into the broad, sweet sunshine.

* * * * *

"Will you favour us with some music, Mrs. King?" asks Lady Brooklyn, as the three ladies sit in the drawing-room, awaiting the advent of the tea and the gentlemen.

"Certainly, if you wish it, Lady Brooklyn," responds Juliet, rising; while Maizie, glad of the diversion, and anxious to hear what sort of music those large white hands can wake, opens the piano, and lights the candles with great alacrity. "What shall it be?" asks the actress, seating herself gracefully before the instrument, and laying her fragrant pocket handkerchief and glittering fan on one of the candle stands. "What shall it be? vocal or instrumental? sad or glad?"

"Vocal, if you please," answers her ladyship; "and something light and gay."

"I am no musician, I warn you. My voice has had little or no cultivation. There

is not enough of it to make it worth while."

Silence. Chords struck here and there on the rich-toned piano; struck awkwardly, as if by stiff, unpractised fingers, and then a low, thrilling voice creeps forth; a voice untrained in singing, but capable of subtlest expression; poor in vocal effect, limited in compass; but possessed of the peculiar inflexion that finds its way to the heart.

This is the song she sings:—

"The moon is shining—shimm'ring;
Shimm'ring across the sea;
The twilight days are ended;
My love! thou'st come to me!"

Just as she breathes out the last line, her deep eyes, looking up, meet those of the tutor, who happens to be entering the room at the moment, followed by her husband. She glances away immediately, and continues the song:—

"Long, long has thy absence been!
Weary each sunset glow!
Now in the moonlight I clasp thee!
I who have loved thee so!

"Ah! how have the years been scanned?
How have the days been borne?
And all the dreary hours
That heart from heart have torn?

"I know not. Th' anguish is o'er!
Darkness and sunlight are fled!
Now in the moonlight I have thee;
Thou whom I mourn'd as dead!

"Ask not of sorrow to-night;
Tell not of doubts and fears.
Standing here in the moonlight,
Let us forget our tears!

"Speak not of gladness to night;
Hearts so close cannot dream!
We've a union bland and lasting,
For joy that did but seem!

"Sweetly the moonlight glimmers—
Glimmers upon the sea.
I'm careless of life or death!
My heav'n has come to me!"

There is silence for a moment or two after the rich voice dies away. Then Lady Brooklyn speaks.

"Thank you, Mrs. King; a very pretty song, and not melancholy, which is an immense recommendation to my mind. I can't

bear those wailing ballads; they make me feel uncomfortable, as if something were going wrong, or somebody were crying."

Juliet makes some appropriate answer to her ladyship's drowsy speech, and looks round for the rest of the company. Her husband is quite close, leaning against the piano; but where are Maizie and M. Valance? Oh, there they are! seated together in the bow window. She can see a bit of Maizie's dress and one of the tutor's feet.

"Pray give us something else, if you are not tired," says Lady Brooklyn, as Juliet rises from the piano.

"I am not tired; but isn't it some one else's turn? Will not Miss Brooklyn favour us?"

"Maizie!" calls her ladyship; but Maizie does not heed. Perhaps she does not hear.

"Sing something else, Juliet, and leave Maizie in peace," says Dr. King, *sotto voce*, to his wife.

"I'm sure I have no wish to disturb her," murmurs Juliet, lazily sinking down into an invitingly low, and softly-cushioned, chair.

"Maizie!" calls Lady Brooklyn, again."

"Yes,—what is it Mamma?" answers the girl, coming forward with bright, flushed cheeks and brilliant eyes.

"We want you to sing something, dear."

"Very well! What would you like?"

Then turning to M. Valance, who has followed her from their retreat, and glancing up into his face with a shy fondness, infinitely charming, she repeated, with an indescribable accent upon the pronoun: "What would *you* like?"

"Let me see; come and let us look over your portfolio together, and I will choose one."

"Shall I play your accompaniment, Miss Brooklyn," volunteers Juliet, politely.

"Thank you!—no; I can manage it. I am accustomed to playing my own."

Maizie finds it hard to prevent answering

shortly, notwithstanding her lover's quieting version, related since dinner, of the old friendship existing between him and the dangerously handsome woman, with the queer, deep eyes and white face.

Juliet rises, in spite of her services having been so firmly rejected, and saunters to the piano.

"May I see some of your songs?" she asks.

"I haven't many; all that I have are here," says Maizie, opening her portfolio, and laying it on the piano, before Juliet.

"Which are you going to sing? asks Juliet, turning them over carelessly.

"Will you choose one?" asks Maizie of M. Valance.

"When Mrs. King has done with the portfolio," he answers, gravely.

"Sing this—do! pleads Juliet, picking out a difficult Italian *scena*."

"No, let us have something English," objects M. Valance.

"Yes, after; but do sing this first," (holding it out to Maizie).

"I do not know that. M. Valance will choose something; he has often heard me sing them all, and he knows which I can sing best," says Maizie, almost rudely.

She is provoked with Juliet's interference and self-assertion.

"So be it; I didn't know that M. Valance was a musical connoisseur *amongst other things!*"

Mrs. King moves away from the piano, and leaves her sting behind her, in the shape of those last three words, "amongst other things."

It is not so much the words themselves, as the tone in which they were uttered, that bites and smarts in Maizie's heart.

"I have found one," says M. Valance, softly; and then, as the girl seats herself at the piano, he bends over her to place the song he has chosen on the stand; and his lips caress her hands, and soothe away the vexed

tremour. "Don't let her hurt you, darling," he murmurs.

Her great eyes look into his with a wonderful light trembling in their soft grey depths. "Nothing can hurt me now," she whispers; "nothing can *really* hurt me now."

CHAPTER IX.

"She lied and stole,
And spat into my love's pure pyx,
The rank saliva of her soul."
(Bianca.)

"Did Dr. King catch his train? asks Lady Brooklyn, sleepily. It is nine o'clock the following morning. The maid is just entering with her ladyship's tea. Her ladyship's eyes are still closed.

"Yes, your ladyship, Peter" (the coachman) "has come back from the station with the dog-cart, and says as the Doctor was in plenty of time."

"The dog-cart? Where did their luggage go?"

One of Lady Brooklyn's eyes unclose, and blink feebly at the spruce young female who is arranging a tiny tray, and cup and saucer, by her side.

"Please, my lady, Dr. King took his luggage with him, on the hind seat; only a small portmantum, my lady."

"But Mrs. King; her luggage?"

Both Lady Brooklyn's eyes are open now, and staring round at Sarah Ann.

"Mrs. King has not yet risen, my lady; and as for her luggage, it's all unpacked, for I did it myself; and laid away neatly in the large ward-robe, leastways, her dresses; such beautiful dre——"

"Mrs. King has not gone with her husband?"

"Not she, my lady: had she ever such intention, my lady?"

"I don't know," murmurs Lady Brooklyn, sinking back on her pillow. She is beginning to feel doubtful about her power, or anybody's power of discrimination, as regards the intentions of Juliet King.

"Please, my lady, Dr. King left a note for you; and here it is beside your cup: I

should have brought to you before, but the doctor said himself, as I wasn't to disturb you, it not being anything important."

Lady Brooklyn stretches out her hand for the note, and opens it, while Sarah Ann opens the shutters, and draws aside the bed-curtains, to enable her to decipher the missive.

"Dear Lady Brooklyn" (runs the hasty note), "our plans are a little changed since last night? I proceed to Bath alone, as my wife prefers to remain under your kind roof for a few days. We have been able to settle about an escort for her, when she shall follow me. Hoping this arrangement will in no way inconvenience you, I remain, yours sincerely, ARTHUR KING."

"That man is entirely ruled by his wife!" is her ladyship's comment to herself, after the perusal of the foregoing note. "Entirely!"

It is a bright, frosty morning; Maizie

is already up and out, picking pretty berries and scentless winter flowers, to place in the drawing-room vases. She has not slept well. Great happiness is as sure a preventitive to sleep as great sorrow. All night long her pulses have been throbbing in tune to the wonderful strain of music that has wakened in her life. If she fell asleep sometimes for a moment, it was only to start up suddenly with a dazzle before her eyes, and a thrill through her limbs, as if an angel's voice had called her. She has not wished for sleep. The darkness has not been gloomy: it has been illumined by the soft sweet light of love. The hours have not been tedious — nay, Eternity would not be tedious, spent in thinking such thoughts. The silence has not been oppressive nor lonely, for one has been near—so near she has heard his voice murmuring—murmuring and whispering strange, sweet words, blissful half-articulated endearments. Nights of

this sort, albeit sleepless, do not wear, nor jade one. Slumber can well be dispensed with by those who feast upon ambrosial food, and sup the wine of love; so warmed—so sustained, they neither need nor desire "nature's sweet restorer."

Maizie's eyes are bright, her cheeks are fresh. No sign of midnight watching shadows her fair uplifted brow. She sings to herself as she plucks a flower here and a branch there. Her basket is pretty nearly full now, and it is getting on to ten o'clock. She turns her steps towards the house. As she passes the dining-room window she sees, what for the moment she takes to be a ghost; a tall dark-haired woman, looking out at her, with eye-lash shrouded eyes—eyes that she believed to be, ere now, miles and miles away from Castle Grange—eyes that she hoped never to see again. The apparition startles her so, she lets her basket fall, and all her newly-gathered treasures roll hither and thither

upon the frost-whitened, frost-stiffened grass.

The French window opens immediately, and the stately ghost comes to her assistance —a substantial ghost enough be it said, clad in a heavy velvet robe, trimmed with fur.

"I'm sorry I startled you," says Juliet, treading gracefully over the hard ground— "let me help you to pick up these pretty flowers."

"Thank you—I understood that Dr. King was to leave this morning by the early train?"

"Dr. King has left, and I am to follow him in a few days; I told him I hadn't had time even to see the place, nor to make any kind of acquaintance with you."

Maizie tries to utter some polite lie about this unwelcome guest being "very welcome," but her truthful lips refuse the task.

"The place is not much worth seeing at present," she blunders out.

"No, I can imagine that it looks its best

in summer, and though I am very fond of old country-houses, and though I have long desired to make your acquaintance, I must own that there was yet another and a stronger reason for my wanting to remain here for a few days."

The flowers are all replaced in the basket now—Maizie lifts it in her arms again as Juliet speaks.

"Let us go in," she says, with a shiver, "it is cold out here."

Juliet is not deceived by the cool indifference of the girl's words and manner; for her quick eyes caught sight of the startled, uneasy colour that stained the fair face, bending low over the flowers, as she gave utterance to her last oracular sentence.

"Yes, do come into the dining-room, I have been coaxing up a delightful blaze there."

So saying, she leads the way back through the open window, Maizie following with her flowers.

Breakfast is ready and waiting—the tea urn and coffee urn, at opposite ends of the table, are singing an inspiriting duet. Maizie takes off her hat and jacket and shakes back her golden mane.

"We will begin if you please," she says; "mamma does not like us to wait for her—she is sometimes rather late in the morning."

Juliet assents willingly, and they take their seats.

"Does not M. Valance breakfast with you?" asks Juliet presently, stirring her hot coffee, and glancing with unwilling admiration at the fresh young beauty of her hostess.

"No; he always breakfasts early with Louis."

"Have you seen him this morning? he was up to see my husband off."

"No, I have not seen him; he is busy in the mornings teaching Louis."

"But not now, surely."

Again the fair face flushes; but Maizie speaks up bravely.

"Yes; he told mamma yesterday that he intended to continue superintending my brother's studies, till another was found to take his place."

"How very good of him!"

"It is a pleasure to him; he is fond of Louis."

"Still; just now you know he might be excused for wishing to be idle."

The deep eyes glance meaningly at the pretty betrothal ring on Maizie's left hand.

"M. Valance cannot bear to be idle at any time," answers the girl, purposely misunderstanding the allusion.

There is silence for some minutes after this. Juliet consumes some toast and butter, and a new-laid egg; and then she raises her head and allows her eyes to rest pensively upon her companions face. The scrutiny is disagreeable to Maizie. She half turns away

her face. She seeks for something to say. Juliet averts her eyes suddenly, and sighs. Maizie makes a false move: she feels it *is* a false move; but inclination overcomes caution.

"You said you had another and a stronger reason for wishing to remain here longer," she says, inquiringly. "Does it in any way concern the inmates of this house? Excuse me if the question appear impertinent; but in this house all my deepest interests centre."

"My dear Miss Brooklyn, pray don't apologise; your frankness is so refreshing; I cannot tell you how grateful it is to a woman like myself to meet with it. You make a difficult, almost, I was beginning to fear, an impossible duty, easy by your straightforwardness."

"Duty?"

"Ah! you think perhaps that is to grave a word for one who has passed such a careless, precarious life. Well! I own I have not

often done what is called duty;" (Juliet guesses, and guesses correctly, that Bertram has already told his betrothed that she [Juliet] is not exactly 'goody-goody') "yet somehow I feel as if I were compelled to make some sign; to utter some warning that shall wake you from your dream of security."

"What do you mean? What can you mean?"

They have both risen, and are standing side by side on the hearth-rug. Juliet lays her hand upon her auditor's shoulder, and pushes back the heavy tresses drooping over it.

"You must promise me one thing before I go any further," she says, earnestly.

Maizie starts away from her touch, and throws back her head with the old wilful toss.

"I hate promises!" she says, impetuously; "And I hate mysteries!"

Juliet is silent; she gazes at Maizie for a

moment with sorrowful thoughtfulness, and then turns away quietly and sighs; Maizie is repentant directly for her rudeness.

"Excuse me," she says, softly; but a promise that was once exacted from me cost me so much, that the very word has caught some of the terror of that struggle."

"A struggle? then your life has not been all bright—all glad!"

"No; it has not; but I would rather not speak of that part: it is over now. Its shadow only serves to throw out in sweet relief my present happiness."

"Your present happiness!" repeats the other, almost in a whisper; while her deep eyes rest upon the girl's face, with the same sad pity in them as before.

"Are you so happy?" she asks, gently.

Maizie does not speak. She turns her face to her interloter, as if to bid her seek an answer there. Not difficult to read, surely, that beautiful, ingenuous countenance,

flashing and alive with joy. Not difficult to guess the meaning of those tremulous, smiling lips; those wrapt impassioned eyes; that seamless, alabaster brow.

Juliet turns away from her contemplation of it, and draws her long, slim hand hastily across her eyes.

"So happy!" she murmurs, as if to herself, gazing into the fire; "so happy!"

"So perfectly, wonderfully happy!" repeats Maizie, her voice quivering; her hands clasped. "So happy that I am afraid sometimes!"

"Afraid?" Juliet glances suddenly away from the fire as if startled. "Afraid of what: in what direction do your fears reach?"

"My fears?—I have none; it is only a kind of awe that I should be so absolutely happy. Do you not know?"

"No, I have never been happy enough I suppose. You say then you have *no* fear; you are so young, or you would know how

dangerous is such complete trust; such child-like rest."

"Dangerous! what do you mean?"

"I hardly know, I—" says Juliet, stammering and turning away in well-feigned confusion.

"Mrs. King" (Maizie speaks with a steady dignity, and lays her hand upon Juliet's shoulder, as the latter leans against the high, old-fashioned chimney-piece, as if to force her attention) "I must beg you to speak out plainly what is in your mind; these hints and signs can do no good to you, and are most unsatisfactory to me."

"O it is hard—hard," murmurs Juliet, half inaudibly, "I, who might so easily have avoided it; I, who would rather thrust my hand into this fire than be the one to lift the veil."

"Will you kindly speak out?" asks Maizie, rather impatiently; she is not alarmed, only annoyed at her guest's mysterious manner.

"I cannot—I dare not, till I have your promise."

"What promise?"

"A promise of secrecy."

"I hate secrets."

"Then you would rather not hear it. You relieve me" (lifting her head from the mantel piece), "though I fear it is a selfish feeling on my part, yet—"

"Whom does the secret concern? tell me that much."

"It concerns you through someone very near and dear to you."

"Ber—M. Valance; does it concern him?"

Silence.

"I will know what it is—I will know," cries the girl, with flashing eyes and dilating nostrils.

"Hush, hush, I beg of you; I cannot tell you aught till I have your promise."

"I will tell no one but him."

"Alas! he is just the one it would be fatal to tell."

"Is it for his good that I should know?"

"For his good; yes, for both your goods."

"I promise."

"Never to breathe a word of what I tell you to *anyone*: never to breathe a word of it to M. Valance?"

"I promise."

Juliet hides her face on the chimney-piece, again, and shudders. Has remorse seized her wild heart, just in time to prevent its last devilish, desperate venture. Or is her emotion merely the eagerness of one who nears the critical point in a skilful game?

"Well!" utters Maizie.

She has no fear — even now — standing there, in her brave young beauty, round which the love of a true heart has thrown its protection.

'Have mercy! let me collect my thoughts; ah! that I should have to say it; you will hate me. Say you will not hate me."

'Not if you tell me the truth; not if you

have done me no wrong, or him."

"The truth! the truth; but it is so hard to tell it. Ah, Maizie! you are so young; your happiness is so pure, so real. It is dreadful! dreadful!"

The actress throws herself into a chair and rocks backwards and forwards, hiding her face with both hands.

"Mrs. King" (speaking quietly, even pityingly), "I feel your are distressing yourself, needlessly. I assure you my happiness is perfectly secure. We love each other; nothing can hurt us."

"Your confidence only makes it harder for me to proceed. If you will only try and doubt; if you would only allow yourself to fear, it would prepare you; but as it is——"

"As it is, I insist upon your immediately telling me all you know. I have given my promise. I have a right to the informaton you can supply."

Slowly Juliet rises from her chair. Slowly

she advances to the girl: slowly and heavily she lays her hand upon her arm. Maizie does not flinch, nor recede. Steadily, calmly, she awaits the revelation. Juliet looks into the fair, fearless face; and then she turns her head on one side, and asks brokenly:—

"Do you remember your mother?"

"Faintly; very, very faintly; more as a dream than a reality."

"She was very beautiful!"

"So I have heard."

A pause—Juliet takes hold of some of the golden hair near her hand—takes hold of it tenderly, regretfully, as though it were the hair of a dead person.

"She was very much like you."

"So I have heard."

"The likeness is startling to a new-comer—it took away my breath when first I saw you."

"You knew my mother, then?"

"Yes."

"M. Valance knew her too."

"Did he tell you so himself?"

"Yes."

"He was quite young at that time. She was very, very beautiful!"

Two sentences, subtly linked by an inflexion of the voice. Maizie neither perceives nor hears the connection between the statements.

"Yes, yes; and they acted together; they belonged to the same company; he told me so; but what then?"

"Did he tell you anything else?"

"He said my mother was his dearest friend, in those days. He spoke of her tenderly and sadly!"

"His *dearest* friend?"

"Yes; and I was glad to know it—it is a pleasant thought—is it not?"

"Glad! pleasant! O my God!"

The actress recoils from the girl with a shocked, horrified gesture.

Maizie pales, as a dreadful, vague sense visits her of some tragic sorrow connecting the past with the present; but as yet she does not perceive in what direction all these hints and disturbing utterances are pointing. Her mind is too absolutely pure to receive the actress's hideous inuendos, and covert meanings. She speaks calmly, albeit a fixed, stern look has come into her great eyes, and her cheek's sweet colour has fled away.

"Why should I not be glad?"

"This is *intolerable*!" (writhing, as if with acute anguish). "Oh, poor child! poor innocent, misguided child! my heart bleeds for you. It is like speaking of death to an infant; and yet it must be done; it must—it must." (Then turning a distorted, quivering face to the girl): "You will forgive me, will you not? Oh, this duty; that it should have fallen upon me! These two" (turning away her face again, and speaking with difficulty) "—your mother and M. Valance—" (again the

actress pauses, panting distressfully, with thrown-back head and parted lips)—

"Go on—My mother and M. Valance—"

"Were *married.*"

Silence for a little space. Juliet sits down, and buries her face in her hands. Presently a clear young voice breaks the hush:

"I don't believe it! Mrs. King, look up and answer my questions; look up if you can after uttering such a black falsehood!"

"Miss Brooklyn" (rising up stiffly)—"Ah!" (suddenly changing her voice and attitude)—"but I will not take offence. It is better that you should speak thus; it is well that you are angry."

"Explain what shadow of possibility your statement rests on," proceeds Maizie, sternly.

"Your father was divorced, or at least separated from your mother; you are aware of that?"

"Yes."

"Do you know why?"

"Because she would not relinquish her stage career."

"So the world was told; but it was because her heart was Bertram's,—and her husband knew it; and the knowledge poisoned his life. She might go where she chose, he told her; he cared not to retain her bodily presence while her heart roved from him."

Juliet pauses; Maizie's eyes are fixed upon her with such scornful incredulity.

"Go on; where did you meet my mother?"

"In Paris, we all happened to belong to the same troupe—she, M. Valance, and myself."

"Well?"

"Well, they loved each other—at least, she loved him; and he was very young, and dazzled by her beauty, and her talents, and—"

"Go on."

"It is very hard to make myself understood by you who know nothing, thank God! of actors' and actresses' lives. However, matters

went on, and on. People began to talk, and at last she persuaded him to marry her for the sake of her good name. I was the only person to whom she confided her intention. They were married one morning—and that very night—her bridal night, she — she — her death occurred."

"Did anyone know of this marriage, but you?"

"No one, except——. Do you remember your old French nurse?"

"Yes; Janetta: she died four years ago."

"She and myself were the only two people cognisant of the affair. They were married by license. It was Ber——M. Valance's wish to keep it strictly private."

"I do not credit your tale for one single second—I will ask M. Valance how—"

"You will do no such thing," cries Juliet, seizing the girl's arm in real terror; "remember your promise."

Maizie stands still, regarding the actress

with eyes that are one blaze of scornful light.

"My promise—aye, I am glad I made the promise, it affords me an excuse to keep this shameful, pitiful falsehood from him—this vile, foul invention of your own lying brain. Woman, do you take me for a fool, that you ask me to believe an utterly improbable, unprovable tale? Do you think me as mad as I believe you to be, that you dare arraign to my face my dead mother and the man I love?"

"Hush! I beg of you to be calm—after all it is no very heinous sin I accuse them of. Your mother, her love was more than sufficient excuse, and as for M. Valance—what will you have? He loves you—he thinks there is no one living who knew of his former marriage—"

"Hush, I will hear no more, your pleading is even a deeper insult than your accusation—I will hear no more."

There is a silence. Juliet hides her face and weeps. There are actresses that can do this with great facility when the situation demands it of them.

Presently she approaches Maizie, her face all tear-stained, her head drooping.

"Miss Brooklyn," (voice trembling and bosom heaving) "though you do not credit me, will you at least forgive me for having been unfortunate enough to feel compelled to tell you what I know."

Maizie does not answer directly. Her whole soul revolts against the woman by her side. She finds it impossible at the moment to forgive or tolerate her. Suddenly she catches sight of M. Valance crossing the frosty sward outside. A great flood of ruthful joy, joy such as only true love knows, springs into her grave innocent eyes. She turns to the weeping, cringing woman near her. Her slight, tall figure seems to expand and radiate like a flame drawn upwards.

"I forgive you," she says, "I am so happy I cannot help it—as to crediting you, try and make me doubt the fact of my own existence—swear to me 'that life and death, and the great vast for-ever,' are myths—but never waste your strength in another effort to destroy my faith in M. Valance; I believe in him, as I believe in God."

Without waiting for a reply, the girl quits the room to join her lover, where he awaits her on the sunny lawn.

Juliet's face, as the door closes, undergoes a transformation. The tears dry up in her deep eyes, and a hungry, baffled look lives there instead. Her lips no longer quivering, shut tightly one upon another. It is astonishing the resemblance one sometimes sees between the faces of human beings and those of four-footed beasts. It is a fact which demonstrates very clearly the truth of the theory that what is called "likeness" consists more in similarity of expression than

facsimile of feature. Anyone catching a glimpse just now of the face of the velvet and ermine-clad woman, standing by herself in the richly-appointed oak parlour of Castle Grange, would be strongly and irresistibly reminded of the lolling tongue and distended eye-balls of a wolf on the track.

CHAPTER X.

"The bond that links our souls together,
Will it last through stormy weather?"
(A. Proctor.)

"AT last!" says M. Valance, stretching out his hands as Maizie crosses the strip of lawn whose stiff, white veil has melted away in the warm, genial rays of the sun, even as pride and virginity melt in the heat of love's crucible. "At last!" he repeats, clasping her hands, and smiling down upon her in tender loving-wise.

"Have I been so long?" she asks, with a sudden swift up-glancing of her lowered eyes.

"So long! and you have not wished me good morning yet."

"Good morning, Bertram," pronounce the rosy lips demurely.

"Very nicely said, but I want it rendered in a different language—the language that the deaf and dumb use—those whose souls can only be reached through the sense of touch."

He bends down, and lifts the shy, sweet face tenderly with his strong hand. First their eyes meet, lingeringly, longingly, and then their lips, quiveringly, passionately. First the glad leisurely greeting of the spirits that have all eternity to know each other in, and then the mad clinging (that has always a certain despair in its ecstasy) of the bodies that must lie apart some day, and moulder in separate tombs.

A shadow falls on Maizie's radiant face as they saunter along presently, side by side, and hand in hand—a dim vague shadow cast by some formless, obscure image of thought.

"Of what are you thinking?" asks M. Valance, as he asked some three months ago, when Maizie and he were nothing but master

and pupil—when the feeling that prompted the inquiry was kindly interest. Now he has a right to question; now the whole of that bright intelligence *belongs* to him. Now he is eager for every thought, every passing fancy to be confided to him, as a man who has bought a rich field is eager to dig for the fresh treasures that he knows lie hid in it.

"I don't know—I'm afraid somehow—afraid—" answers Maizie, looking up with the awed, troubled look, he knows so well, in her beautiful eyes.

"Afraid, my darling! afraid when you are so close to *me*?" he asks, looking into her up-turned eyes, as if to let the love burning in his own reach through them to soothe her soul.

"I'm so happy—so very, very happy," she whispers, with the spirit-scared look still in her eyes. "So much happier even than—even than in my day-dreams; so much happier than I have ever imagined in all my gorgeous castle-building."

"And you are afraid of your happiness, as you told me once you were afraid of your day dreams?"

"Yes, it is the same kind of feeling—only ten times stronger. I was thirsting for joy then—my mind was feeling after it all day, and every hour of the day; and with this thirst, and this eagerness, there came at times a sad alarm that perhaps the future I was reaching after so ceaselessly, and possessing already in part, as we do possess things greatly desired, would be a series of sad, dark days; of lonely, cheerless years, such as I had often heard of as being the portion of others on the earth; and that God would be angry with me for taking, even in imagination, the joy that was not mine, and punish me for my presumption by disappointing all my hopes, and causing all my foolish visions to mock me. You" (with a sudden glow in the grey eyes, driving away the vague trouble—like sunlight dissolving mist) "dissipated that

fear. You soothed and comforted all those vague apprehensions away as no one else could have."

"Darling! then let me try my hand on this one."

"This is different. Bertram, Bertram, how do people bear it—to lose and leave when they have once found and loved? To me everything seems possible but *this*—to enter heaven and be thrust out again—to have heard the songs of angels—to have experienced bliss—to have seen love face to face, and to wander out again into the cold dark world. O God, the intolerable contrast! O God, the memory-haunted madness of that misery!"

Shuddering and quailing, Maizie hides her eyes upon her lover's shoulder, as if her thought has taken form, and she wishes to shut out its hideous shape.

"Mazie, my life, my precious, why think of such things? God is good, He will not try us above that we are able to bear; we

have His promise for it; and dearest, there *can* be no such thing as parting between you and me—look up." Obediently the grey eyes quit their hiding place and fasten on his. "Death will not part us; cannot you feel that, sweet?" Yes, he can see she does, by the deep assurance that wakes in her lovely eyes. "Death will not, and life shall not."

"Never, never!"

They are silent as they pass out of the winter sunlight into the shady laurel walk, clinging to each other. They are silent, and M. Valance holds his hat in his hand, as though he stood in God's house. These eternal unions are solemn. Presently they emerge into the flickering sunlight, and then their tongues are loosed again.

"Do you remember that day we saw you, Captain Brace and I, as you were coming out of the summer house?" asks Maizie, as they stroll up the leafless oak wood.

"Yes, I remember."

"You looked so stern, I thought you must have been engaged in conning that mysterious book in which you abuse yourself so mercilessly."

"Abuse myself, who told you I did?"

"You, yourself; at least you implied it—you said you analysed your heart and mind in it, and you told me at another time that self-analysis was a very good thing when one's faculties and passions wanted calling to order."

"It is good also in another way. It is a great relief to those who are companionless. I'm afraid the habit is more a luxury than a corrective with me. I intend to burn that book. I will begin a new one, and you shall write it with me."

"Yes, for I know some of your thoughts better than you know them yourself. It will be a grand book this new one, for I shall not let you write anything unjust about your 'inner man.' It will be a grand book, for you have a grand soul, Bertram."

"I have a happy soul, sweetheart, *now*."

"It has not always been happy" (with a quick-caught breath). "Ah, I know so well, I read the signs so clearly. You have suffered terribly, terribly. Bertram, shew me this book of yours, that you have written in during these sad past years—shew me it, that I may weep the tears over it with which my heart is big."

"No, no—let the 'dead past bury its dead,' I would not have you grieve over sorrows that have long since passed away, little one; you will have enough to shed your precious tears over in the present without carrying that tender little heart of yours into the long-ago years."

"But I am jealous of this mysterious past, this past in which I had no share, no place."

"Ah, but you had a place in it, a very important place too."

"Had I?—Had I, Bertram; what can you mean?"

"I mean that you came to me some twelve or eleven years ago; came to me in a vision of the night, and comforted me when I was despairing."

"Bertram!"

"You did indeed."

They are sitting in the summer-house now, and M. Valance draws the girl close to him, and presses her fair head down upon his shoulder.

"I can't think how that could have been," she says, when he sets her lips free.

"I had a dream one night when I had fallen asleep, ill and weary. It was a sad dream at first, for I was lost and lonely; but towards the end, it grew heavenly bright, for you came and took my hand in yours."

"And was this dream-girl exactly like me? Twelve years ago! I could only have been six years old then."

"She was exactly like you—like what you are now, and moreover the dream has

come true; the meaning that I felt was hidden in it has come true, as well as the incident it foreshadowed."

"When did it come true?"

"The incident or the meaning?"

"Both."

"They were not fulfilled together. Do you remember that evening, the evening of the day I saw you walking in this wood with Captain Brace?"

"Yes," she answers, stroking his face with her soft hand, as if to soothe away from it the memory of that pain.

"Do you remember how you came and sat down by my side, and kissed my hand in an impulse of pure pity? The incident of my dream came true then, and puzzled me sorely with the certain sense of it all having happened before."

"Ah! I now know why you appeared so strange and absent."

"I remembered afterwards how it had hap-

pened to me before; but about the meaning of my dream—the sweet interpretation of the peace and joy it left me, you can guess when that came true, beloved—came true so completely and wonderfully that my heart only half believing, growing faint with the expectant years, was crushed and amazed at the blissful consummation which God had promised it; for the mysterious sense of coming good He sent folded in that dream *was* a promise, and His promises are sure."

"My mother was dead when you dreamed that dream," remarks Maizie, after a pause, lifting her bright head."

"Yes, why?"

"Because I was thinking as you knew her so well, and she was so like what I am now, that perhaps it was *her* you saw in your dream."

"But it was not her. Do you think I should not have known if it had been Marie, your mother?"

"Did you use to call her 'Marie'?" She does not look at him as she asks the question.

"Yes, we knew each other so well," he says, and he rises, while a pained look flashes across his face.

"Am I so very like her?" rising also, and putting her hand on his arm to make him turn and look at her face. He turns and frames it in his hands.

"Very like, and yet very unlike," he pronounces.

"Just what my father said. Then you are sure it was *my* face you saw in your dream?"

"Yes, quite sure. It has led me on, and bid me hope through all these years. If it had not been for that dream-face I believe despair would have been my end."

"Did you recognize me when you first saw me as the girl of your dream?"

"Your face was never strange to me—

never unfamiliar, yet I did not recall where I had seen it before till one day, when it looked in at me through the open window of the school-room as I sat writing. Do you remember?"

Ah, these mutual rememberings, how sweet they are!

"Yes, so well, and every word you said, and every look you looked. Bertram, as if I *could* forget."

"Blessed little face" (kissing lips and brow and eyes, as it leans upon his breast), "beckoning me on through the gloom, smiling away my disbelief, leading me on through the night to this blissful day!"

"Tell me all about the night, Bertram, I want to know about this dreadful past."

She has raised her head as she speaks. He presses it down upon his shoulder with tender impatience.

"Why cannot you leave the past alone, when the present is so sweet?" he exclaims

"I want to hear about my mother; no one has ever spoken to me about her, and you who knew her so well" (is it only her fancy that she feels a quiver run through the strong frame she leans against?)—"you might" (her voice shakes and fails)—"you might tell me so much."

He presses his cheek down upon her fair head, but he does not speak.

"Why are you so loath to tell me of her?" she asks, and her voice sounds quivering and affrighted.

"Because" (raising his head and speaking very low and quickly) "dearly as I loved her, her memory is fraught with exquisite pain—there came a bitter end to our communion, her death was distressfully sudden."

Maizie feels the clasping arms of her lover loosening—loosening! She feels his chest stirring and heaving! She hears a strange agitation in his voice! She clings to him still! She nestles her head closer to him!

She lifts her arms and twines them about his neck in a passion of doubt and fear.

"I never heard what caused my mother's death; tell me how it happened?" she urges, faintly.

He does not speak immediately, he puts up his hands and takes the twining arms from about his neck, as if their pressure chokes him.

"Some say she was murdered," he says, hoarsely; then suddenly clasping her in his arms again, and straining her to him in a breathless paroxysm of terror and love—"Maizie! Maizie!" he cries wildly, "will you not leave this past alone—will you not be content to let it rest till the day when all things shall be made clear. O, my darling! my darling! can you not trust me with your future, and leave these miserable years where I have left them, with God."

She has freed herself from him. Her face is white and cold as marble. There is no

anger or resentment in her fixed regard—only the wildest terror he has ever seen in human eyes.

"With God?" she asks, whisperingly—"with God!"

"Aye, with God, Who knows" (taking her cold hands, and speaking with earnest solemnity); "with Him Who sent the sorrow, and the shame that looked like sin—with Him Who alone can see the innermost workings of the heart, and Who will one day make the dull, dark misery of those buried years transparent and bright as summer sunlight. Can you not wait for the unfolding till we get to heaven, dearest?"

Silence—Maizie has turned from him. Her eyes, wide and fixed, are staring blankly into the distance, with the mad absorption of overpowering fear.

"Maizie, look at me."

Mechanically she obeys that voice; shivering in every limb as though smitten with

some deadly fever, she turns her ghastly face and great panic-stricken eyes towards him.

"Maizie, why do you look at me like that?" Then lifting up his voice he calls upon her again and again in bitter, hopeless accents, as though she were dead or lost—"Maizie! Maizie! Maizie!"

She creeps nearer to him, with the horrible changeless stare still in her eyes, and lays an icy hand upon his coat-sleeve.

"Hush," she whispers, "O, hush, hush."

He looks at her, but he does not touch her; he looks at her little shaking hand upon his arm; at her dilated eyes and colourless face.

"Why do you tremble so?" he groans fiercely. "Why are you so deathly white? What is the matter? What have I done to you?—tell me, tell me."

She does not speak, only she takes her hand quietly from his arm, and lays her lips against it instead. Such a caress from a

timid, undemonstrative woman would be touching; from a proud, reserved woman, it is appalling. M. Valance gives a sudden moan, as if the soft lips burn him through his coat-sleeve.

"What does this all mean?" he stammers. "You cannot trust me? You wish me to relate all the past?" (then staggers heavily, and sinks upon the bench behind him.) "Must you know all?" he wails, "cannot you trust me? Must you hear all?" Silence. He reaches out his hand and drags her to him. "Let me kiss you before—"

She permits him to take her in his arms. She makes no resistance as he showers down kisses upon her quiet mouth and blanched cheeks; but the pure pale face might be that of a corpse for all the glow or response his caresses waken. He pushes her away at last. Thrusts her out of his arms; then burying his face in his hands. "God help us," he reiterates pitifully—

"God help us!" His brain is in a tumult—fearful thoughts are passing hither and thither in black, hurrying crowds. He cannot arrest them—he cannot see their faces; and now and then, like a funeral bell, there peals solemnly forth, vibrating through heart and brain, the accusation—"You have done her wrong!" "You have done her wrong!"

CHAPTER XI.

"Weep for the love that cannot change."

(*L.E.L.*)

"IF HER LOVE FAILS!"

He remains a long time in this attitude; a reverie of this kind has no boundary; such confused unconsciousness can extend over days as well as minutes. It is a fainting of the soul; those who undergo it are not cognisant of time or place. An hour has elapsed, rather more, when M. Valance raises his head and cries imploringly: "I don't know where to begin—if somebody would only tell me where to begin;" then, as his dazed eyes take in the proportions of the figure standing before him—"Juliet!" he exclaims, "Juliet!"

"Forgive me if I intrude," prays the

actress, in soft, low tones, "but when I saw you sitting so I felt you were in trouble, and—"

"Where is she gone?" (getting up and staring round with bewildered incredulous eyes).

"Miss Brooklyn—it is she you mean? has been in the house for nearly an hour past. Alas! what has happened that you look so wild?"

"I must go to her—I must tell her, but I can't think how to begin."

"Tell her—what? O Bertram, has it come to this—has it really come to this?"

"I have tried so hard to forget this terrible past, and now I must recall every incident, every detail, that she may understand—if I only knew *where* to begin."

"Cannot she trust you Bertram? She loves you, cannot she trust you, and let you keep silence?"

"Silence! no, I have kept silence too

long. It is my fault, I should have told her all long since. She has a right to know. O God! how shall I tell her?" He rises up and seizes Juilet's arm, looking at her with sombre questioning eyes—"How shall I tell her of your villainy? How shall I make my innocence plain?"

"She cannot trust you, then I fear me her's is no true love!"

"Leave her alone, woman; you are not fit to speak of such as her. Her love is as pure and as true as herself."

"So true that it faints, forsooth, at some lost years in her lover's life; so pure, so *delicately* pure that it detects sin through a veil of silence and secrecy—when there is none so hidden."

"So pure that *you* cannot comprehend its purity—so true that you believe not in it!"

"No—I do not believe in it; I have misdoubted it from the first. And you—you doubt it too, Bertram, else you would not fear so to tell her of this past," says Juliet,

boldly fixing her deep, passionate eyes on his averted face.

"I do not doubt her love," he cries, striking his hands together in a kind of frenzy; "before God, I do not! but I'm afraid of shocking her; of horrifying her—my gentle, innocent darling. To tell *her* it was my hand that slew her mother!"

"She will get over the shock and the horror, if there is no fear of her love being hurt, and all will be well," says Juliet, watching the agitated face before her intently.

"You do not understand me. It will not kill her love, but it may kill *herself*, to know what I have to tell her. She is so young—so stainless; she has such a high, almost stern sense of rectitude, she would prefer death to the slightest shadow of dishonour."

"You are afraid, in fact, that the disclosure will cause a separation between you."

He turns away from her that she may not see the corroboration of her surmise upon his

face; turns away to hide the agonizing fear that distorts his every feature.

"Then" (speaking very slowly and with emphasis) "I despise her love."

"You cannot understand her feelings."

"Bertram, I deserve your reproach — I deserve your sneer; I, whose love swept everything before it. Yet, all the same, I despise what you term this girl's love. I call it puny; I call it vain; I call it valueless."

"Hush! be silent this instant" (his dark eyes glowing on her with terrible wrath); "have I not commanded you not to speak of her?"

She shrinks a little before his gaze—bold, careless woman as she is, his eyes yet retain their mastery of her.

"Bertram," she recommences after awhile, in low infinitely pathetic tones, "it is superfluous to tell you that I would willingly die for you, I have proved it so often; I have risked body and soul so gladly for your sake.

I do not want to claim your consideration on this score, but don't you think you might trust me to do my best to make you happy, my love of you?"

"You have had my forgiveness years and years ago, but don't ask for it afresh now—now when I am half mad with the sudden pressure on my heart of the accumulated misery of years."

"O Bertram, it is hard, hard to hear you speak thus, who have dreamed so often of the sweet words of forgiveness you will not say—I who have been so sure you would not hesitate to pardon whenever we met again, whether in this world or the next. Your eyes looked so kind, though so startled, as you recognised me that night before you sprang away into the darkness, that I have been quite certain of your forgiveness. I have repeated the very words I was sure you would say each night before I slept."

"What were the words?" he asks; and

then speaking with quick agitation—"Juliet, don't think me ungrateful or unmindful of the devotion with which you have sought to palliate the crime that has blasted my life, but if it should blast her life—O God! I dare not think of it. Tell me quickly, what were the words? that I may say them, and get it over before this wild fear in my heart is realized, and makes forgiveness impossible for ever—what were the words?"

"'Poor Juliet! the bitter account is washed out at length; I forgive you as God forgives.'"

There is silence for a few moments, and then slowly, and with averted face, he repeats the words—

"Poor Juliet! the bitter account is washed out at length; I forgive you as God forgives."

Down on her knees she sinks, upon the hard frosty ground, in her costly velvet dress, and presses her lips upon his hand, and sobs out her thanks.

"God bless you Bertram! you have eased the worst pain of my heart. O, it has ached so all these years because of your wrath—ached and bled and ceased not—no not in the night time. Tell me what I can do to save your darling, anything, no matter how hard. O, if I could but tear out my heart, so wildly loving, and place it in your love's cold breast."

M. Valance withdraws his hand. She sinks lower and clings about his feet.

"Forgive me if my words are wild—don't turn away—consider what anguish it is to one who would glory in any sacrifice for your sake, to see the woman of your choice falter and doubt, even in your arms. O why, why must it always be the false love that is preferred before the true—why?"

"Mrs. King be silent; if you have no respect for yourself, I conjure you for your noble husband's sake to be silent."

"What!" (starting up and facing him

with all the fearless passion of old) "did you think my love could die? did you think my love that has braved death and ruin, and peril worse than death, did you think it had simply ceased to be because I accepted another's shelter and love in my great despair and loneliness? Alas, alas!" (sinking to his feet again) "it is my everlasting curse, my changeless doom to love you on, and on, and on, through such anguish and scorn and hatred—such laceration of heart and soul as never woman bore. Bertram, you who have forgiven me, pity me a little—you who know what love is, pity me a little, who would so gladly cease to love you if I might. Pity me a little, whose love has been one long agony—an agony never cheered, never eased by a smile or look, or word from the only one who could so cheer and soothe. You who consider" (half turning again, and stretching out protesting hands) "you suffer tortures because your love, who has kissed you and

vowed to you, seems to grow cold—what do you imagine must *my* tortures be like, who never received one caress, one word to satisfy even for a moment the mad hunger of my heart?"

"Hush! hush! I am sorry, very sorry—Juliet, Juliet, calm yourself—Juliet, Juliet—that God should *allow* such misery."

Utterly unnerved by the recital of this strange, strong love of which he is the object, a love he had thought and hoped dead until this wild sequel, M. Valance totters to the bench, hides his face in his hands, and sobs aloud. All that is left of good in the actress's warped and blackened soul comes to the surface at this spectacle.

"Bertram," she says, kneeling down beside him, and her woman's voice takes its true vibration of tenderness and truth—"Don't grieve darling, not for *me*. O love, love! I'm a wicked, reckless woman, not worth a tear

nor a sigh of yours." Then after awhile—"Bertram" she whispers, in toneless sighings of infinite dreamy sweetness, such as had never found their way to any ear save his—"may I ask you one little question—will you bear with me just this once—will you not be angry?"

"No, no."

"If you had not met with this girl, Marie's child—if your heart had still been empty—could you—O forgive me—forgive me for daring to ask—could you—would it have been possible to you to care for me even a little—just *a little?*"

M. Valance raises his head, and regards, with wet, troubled eyes, the splendid woman kneeling by his side. Not a point, not a curve in the superb voluptuous form and gloriously handsome face escapes his keen artist vision; and yet, yet he is not deceived. He could never have loved her; an instinct, the strongest instinct vouchsafed to reason-

able man, assures him of the contrary. His heart is full of compassion for her, of sincere and grieved compassion. He hesitates to reply to her question.

"Your eyes looked so kind that night, kinder than even in my dreams," she murmurs.

"You are wonderfully beautiful," he says, and sighs and looks away.

"Wonderfully beautiful!" she repeats, in tones that hold in them a despair bitter as death—an anguish deep as hell; "and is this your answer. I abhor my beauty—I loathe it! What good has it ever brought me? The only blessing a woman's beauty can win for her it has not won for me. Nay, I did better without it! Tell me, were you not fonder of the plain convict nurse, with the scarred face and awkward gait, than you ever were, or could be, of the 'wonderfully beautiful Juliet?'"

"You were very good to me," he says,

taking her hand and stroking it remorsefully; "if it had not been for you I should have died, and missed——" (he checks himself abruptly), "the joy of my life," he was about to say.

"And missed loving Maizie," finishes the woman at his feet. "You have evaded my question," she continued, in hopeless whispering tones, "you are afraid *of hurting my feelings*," (O the misery of the mocking emphasis). "I will not be spared, however. I have suffered too much to be particular about an extra pang or so. Tell me, if we were the last man and woman left upon the earth, should you prefer me to the *other wild beasts?*—would you seek my society rather than that of the lion, the tiger, and the adder? Would you, as the calm sweet days went on undisturbed by meddling man or maid, would you grow content to linger by my side?—would it be possible for this content to quicken into regard, and—?"

"Juliet, you pain me, you humiliate me.

It is hard to give you an answer to your question with a heart as full of love as mine is now; but I think, I am almost certain if I had not met my darling, my sweet, sweet flower, I could have cared enough for you to make you happy."

A meagre scrap of food to throw to a starving passion! But M. Valance has to strain the truth a wee, even to provide this crumb. He is sorry for the reckless miserable woman who loves him with so deathless a love—sorrier for her than he has ever been for any one. Measuring his own anguish with hers, he finds it comes far short; adding to his present pain all the ruin and terror of his youth; taking all the sufferings of his sad life, and placing them one by one upon each other, the accumulated pile of his sorrows cannot reach the altitude of her one tremendous grief—a grief that reaches down to hell and up to heaven, and can find no help below, no help above, no comfort anywhere.

Poor creature! the passion (that has perhaps passed the imperceptible barrier that divides such a passion from madness) rises up refreshed, strengthened, rendered curbless by this modicum of unwonted nourishment.

"Oh, heaven bless you for those words!" she cries, pressing first her lips and then her forehead against his hands, "and if she fails you, if her love is not strong enough to bear what you have to tell her—"

"You have said enough, I can listen to no more. I go to seek her, and lay my life open before her; the result is with God."

M. Valance has regained his self-control. His voice and face are perfectly calm. The tears he has shed for another's woe have helped to relieve the burden of anguished thought pressing on his brain. His way, his words, his life, are all clear enough before him now. He will go straight to his darling and tell her the story from end to end. He will not hesitate, he will not swerve, and God help her to judge rightly."

"But if she fails—if she fails," cries Juliet, clinging to him still, though he has risen, and stands waiting, hat in hand, to go to his love, "Oh, remember that I love you with a love that *cannot* fail!"

He tries to raise her. "Let me pass," he commands her.

"If her love fails."

"Juliet," he says, bending towards the wretched woman lying in his pathway, with a strange mixture of stateliness and tenderness in his bearing, "Juliet, my poor girl! I cannot say how utterly and deeply pained I am for you. All you have suffered will, I am sure, make God pitiful to you for the rest of your life. Be a good wife to Arthur, and" (bending still lower he kisses one of the poor passionate hands) "believe me that I will be your friend always."

She lets him go then. He passes down the pathway, among the leafless trees, and is quickly out of sight. She holds up her hand

and looks at it, the hand he kissed, as if she expects some change to have come to it.

"The second time," she whispers, "the second time his lips have touched me! The first time was so long ago, fourteen years." She laughs slightly. "What an innocent baby hand it was then; poor foolish baby hand, that had done nothing worse than rub away a few stupid tears. It was wet when he kissed it, I remember, red and wet; I had been crying half the day because I felt lonely without my "padre" and "madre," and he came to comfort me. Bah! it is more worthy his caress now; it has done some work since then. It is not red and wet now, but smooth and white as a lily, or milk, or the kernel of a fresh walnut, as that ingenious flatterer, Captain de Vaux told me the other night. Yes it is decidedly more worthy. It has such splendid decorations too" (making her diamond and emerald rings flash in the pale sunlight). "If her love fails!"

CHAPTER XII.

"O, Leaden Hour! O, Leaden Hour!
The silvern light began to wane;
The winds of God were loosed in power;
Down fell the awful hurricane!"

SUSPENSE.

A RESOLUTION comes to M. Valance as he wends his way to the house. He will give Maizie his diary to read; the mysterious book with the patent clasp, and in it she will find the story of his life complete. It will be better, much better in every way, that she should be able to read the tragedy quietly by herself. It will spare her agitation. She will have plenty of time for reflection and decision. If he told the tale to her personally, he might be tempted to plead and utter superfluous extenuations. In his diary there is no pleading—no appeal to any human

creature; only to God has he cried—only has he entreated the mercy of the Almighty. Her judgment will have nothing to bias or annoy it. Her inclination will be left free voice to speak. There will come no interrupting sobs — no counter persuasions to move her soul to pity, and shake her will and drown her individuality. He should have made the whole dismal business plain long ago, but he did it for the best; always he has considered her well-being before his own. If the risk, the pain, had only been his, why the avowal would not have been difficult. He sees now that he has done her wrong in withholding it at any cost, but "men are men." We cannot always see things as they are.

How common-place the deepest tragedies of life would appear to a spectator. M. Valance toiling up the stairs to his bedroom, looking grave and rather stern, also a little pale as if tired. M. Valance unlocking

a small chest, and taking out a worn leather-covered book, with rubbed corners. M. Valance unlocking the same with a small key suspended to his watch chain. M. Valance standing with the unlocked book in his hand outside a shut door before he knocks. Who would suspect that under each and all of these simple actions lies as thrilling and startling an agony as any that has ever been portrayed on the stage by means of faints and groans and gestures to a pale and expectant audience? Ah, we do these things more quietly in real life.

Reader, have you ever waited through the long, slow hours of a whole afternoon, in deadly suspense—a suspense that will not let you rest nor think, nor speak—a suspense that is more than three parts fear—that is only so faintly penetrated with hope as to prevent despair. If so you can sympathise with M. Valance, as he sits in the cold cheerless school-room awaiting Maizie's decision.

It is now four o'clock; two hours ago he gave into her hands the unsealed history of his life. "You will let me hear from you to-night somehow?" he asked as he did so. "If you do not care to see me you will write?" And she, standing in the door-way, grave and pale, had bowed her head, and then as he turned away, shut the door; and he has not seen her since. "It took long to live it all," he soliloquises, as he sits alone, "but surely it cannot take long to read; it is not nearly so lengthy as that three-volumed novel she was reading the other day, and she said she mastered the contents of that in a couple of hours; she had not *read* it she said, yet when I examined her in it she knew it all; she is very quick of comprehension." He rises and begins to pace up and down. The early winter dusk has already fallen; soon it will be dark. "She must have passed it now," he mutters; "all the worst is at the beginning." He sits down again and rests his

forehead in his hands in the attitude that is common with him. He does not *think*. Pictures of past events, faces, scenes, pass before his darkened eyes, as though his imagination has taken compassion on his poor numbed brain, and is trying to beguile the weary hours by a panoramic display of all its treasures. Now is presented a small damp cell, with the dim light of an oil lamp shining on the rusty iron bars of the high narrow aperture. Now the gleaming of a hundred lamps; the clapping of a thousand hands; a flashing of jewellery; delicate robes, fair faces, and suddenly a stream of deep dark blood, flowing from no one knows where. Now a wreath of dewy rose buds, hanging far away on fresh green undergrowth, beneath the flickering shade of stately trees. Now, for an instant, a wild dark face, starting out of the night, with hood thrown back from it, and moonlight resting on it. Now a flushed, laughing face,

appearing from behind an ivy-covered wall. Now a dumb, drawn face, with ghastly shadow on it, lying so still—so still. Now a splash of waves, and a wide expanse of blue water, and a flash of white sea-gull wings. Now a pair of great grey eyes looking——

The door of the school-room opens slowly, and, as M. Valance raises his head, a woman steals through the shadows to his side. He waits till she is close to him; then his head droops again disappointedly.

"Can I do anything for you?" asks Juliet, "anything to make the time pass; for I know you are waiting for a crisis, by your look and manner. She is long in answering."

"I wish to be alone."

"Can I do nothing for you?"

"Nothing."

Juliet is silent, but she does not go. The clock on the mantel-piece ticks on impatiently, as if trying to hurry the slow-moving minutes.

"Miss Brooklyn had no lunch; shall I go

and see if she wishes for some tea?" asks Juliet softly, after some ten minutes silence.

"You had better ask Lady Brooklyn to see to it."

"Lady Brooklyn is out; she went out soon after lunch, to call on the Braces and some other people. She will not be in much before dinner-time she said."

"Send the maid then."

"I have already done that, but Maizie would not admit her. I am getting rather uneasy to tell the truth; it is so long since she has had anything to eat; she—"

M. Valance looks up quickly, roused and alert. "Certainly some one must go and see to her," he says anxiously, "if you cannot gain an entrance I will go immediately."

"I will go, and will bring you word as soon as possible."

Exit Juliet.

M. Valance paces up and down the room, and gazes into the dreary winter twilight.

His imagination has given up its magic-lantern performance; the last picture it placed in the lens still remains there; a pair of great grey eyes, wistful, frightened, yet with a solemn, rapt expression of changeless love. Everywhere he sees them; never fading—never failing; looking at him so heart-brokenly, yet lovingly, always lovingly. He throws open a window; a chill wind rushes in, and from among the far, faint stars in the darkening sky he sees those steadfast tender eyes watching him still. The tall trees sway backwards and forwards in the rough breeze; the clouds gather and speed, and hide away the stars. Darkness comes on apace, yet still those eyes change not—pass not; ever waiting—ever watching for the end. The end! what end? Unconsciously M. Valance begins softly to remonstrate with them in broken musing-wise. "It must be all over now; dear eyes, you might try and rest and forget for a little while * * there can be

nothing to wait for now * * you must have read the whole * * there is nothing more to learn * *.

"Bertram!" calls Juliet's voice through the room; at the same moment the door bangs. "Do shut the window" she says, advancing into the room, with a lighted candle, which she is trying to shield from the wind with her hands.

"How is she?" he demands eagerly, not heeding her request.

"She is pretty well now; she has been suffering from a bad head-ache all the afternoon she says."

"Did she give you any message, any note?" he asks with a painful catch in his breath.

"I asked her if she had none for me to take to you, and she said no, none. She was lying down on her bed, half undressed, with a book, *your* book, beside her. I got her to take some tea and toast; then I left her. I

went in again shortly to see how she did—" Juliet stops and hesitates, and the wind gives a sudden wail among the branches.

"Well," says M. Valance, impatiently, "how did she seem when you went back?"

"She was very tired you know—" Juliet turns her back on M. Valance and the window and tries to guard the quivering flame of her candle, which the fretful wind seems determined to extinguish; "very tired, quite worn out," she proceeds, in a low hesitating tone, "and when I came back, she—she was fast asleep."

The wind clutches the flame at length with its invisible fingers, and as the bright thing vanishes in its grasp, gives a disappointed groan, and goes sighing and sobbing away to tell the stars what mocking lights they have down on the dull earth.

"Asleep!" repeats M. Valance, dazedly.

"Yes, you must make allowances for her Bertram; she is such a girl, and she has had such a terrible head-ache."

"Asleep, and never a word or a sign; I cannot believe it; she, who was always so tender, so thoughtful, to sleep while I am *dying* for a word, one word."

The darkness is between them; the darkness that renders bad hearts bold. Juliet reaches out her hand and touches the form near her.

"She does not perhaps know what you suffer; she is so young," she says soothingly.

The form recedes from her touch; M. Valance replies not out of the darkness; there is silence, save for the moaning of the wayward passionate wind, that knows nor content nor rest.

"It is half-past six," remarks Juliet, presently, "Lady Brooklyn has come in, and is asking for you. Dinner will be ready a quarter of an hour earlier to-night; it is time for us to dress."

"I do not intend to dine to-night."

"Not dine, what will Lady Brooklyn think?"

"What she pleases."

"But Bertram—"

"I wish to be alone; you can say that I *too* have a head-ache."

Juliet's heart gives a wild exultant throb at the faint touch of bitterness in his tone and words.

"Maizie will waken soon; I will go to her immediately after dinner." Silence. "You will be cold here, and dull; shall I fetch you a light?" she asks.

"No, thank you; I prefer the darkness, it is good for both heart-ache and head-ache."

"Let me close the window at any rate!"

He makes no answer, and she gropes her way to the open window, and shuts it.

She is gone almost directly, and angels come and minister to him; not at once does he hear their spirit voices; not at once do their soothing whispers reach and calm his soul. His feelings have suffered a terrible revulsion; he who would gladly have borne

both his own and her share in the bitter transaction; he who measured her pain by his, and was appalled to think how her gentle heart would bleed; just when his fearful anxiety had become almost unbearable, to hear that she was *sleeping*; that she had been able absolutely to forget her pain and his in sleep; sleep, a condition that argues the complete absence of any acute suffering, any abnormal strain of heart or brain. He could not understand it. He was prepared to hear she was weeping, perhaps fainting; aye, I believe, in the high-strung pitch of dread to which he had arrived during the lonely afternoon, he would scarcely have been startled had Juliet told him she whom he loved was lying chill and still, beyond weeping for herself or him. But asleep! Perhaps she had not read his book. Yes, for Juliet had seen it lying on her bed, and she—she had been so anxious, so eager to learn what was in it. She had surely read it. What

then? It had not distressed her; but why not? She who had been so shaken, so overwhelmed at even a suspicion of a hidden wrong or woe in his past history. If she loved him she must needs be shocked and grieved at the unfolding of a tragedy the horror of which her imagination could not have pictured; a tragedy in which he was the principal actor, the principal sufferer. She does love him, he knows that; knows it beyond doubt, and now as he arrives at this point in his weary cogitations, the spirit-voices make themselves heard; the ministering voices that are always sent to aid the tried and true in their bitter warfare with "principalities and powers, and rulers of darkness." "She loves you, you are assured of that," they whisper, "then why are you troubled because God has sent her rest and release from pain for a short time? Have you not yourself been praying that she might not suffer; that you would bear anything

rather than she should suffer? and because God has sent her sleep, has answered your petitions that have ceased not all the day to rise to Him—behold is this a cause for dismay?" M. Valance bows lower in the darkness; his heart murmurs an answer, indistinct and broken as with shame and pain. "But I did not mean Him to lessen her suffering by chilling her love; her love that is so precious to me, so precious now I have once held it that I cannot resign it." "Yet twice you gave up this love to God." "That was before I had clasped it to me for ever; before I had measured all its delights; I cannot resign it now." "But if there is no other way to save her from the cruelest anguish?" The clear murmurs cease, and there is silence in the little dark chamber; a waiting silence, as if angel forms are lingering and listening for some sign or word from the passionate human heart that is clinging with an agonized frenzy to its

treasure. M. Valance has fallen forward, half-kneeling, half-lying on the floor, with hidden face; still his heart is dumb, in a mute agony of rebellion; still the listening silence fills the room. I don't know how long it lasts; perhaps an hour, perhaps two, but before the expectant silence stirs, before the patience of the invisible messengers is exhausted, there comes a long low moan from the "so-silent" heart. "If there is no other way I give it—her love—I give it." A rustle, a flutter, and then the low moan is borne up towards the stars by bright-winged beings, chanting ever as they fly of victory and peace and joy.

* * * * * *

"Bertram, you will wear yourself out."

Juliet is standing by him, in rustling evening dress, with jewels glittering on arms and neck, and in among the folds of her rich black hair. She holds a lighted candle in her hand.

"Is she sleeping still?"

How calmly he speaks.

"Yes, she was just now; Lady Brooklyn and I were both in her room a few minutes since; I wished to wake her, it seemed so unbearable for *her* to be sleeping quietly in her warm bed, and you here in this cold and darkness, waiting in restless wretchedness; but Lady Brooklyn would not permit it. She said the girl had been very much over-tired, and over-excited for the last three days, and she would not have her wakened on any account."

"I am glad she is still sleeping."

He has risen, and is standing before her, his face is very pale; deadly pale, as faces are apt to be that have been waiting long in gloom and silence; waiting still for life or death, but it is calm, even peaceful in its pallor.

"It is half-past ten o'clock," Juliet remarks, turning away uneasily from the steady

regard of his large brown eyes. "Lady Brooklyn has gone to bed; you must require rest after all your—"

"How did she look in her sleep?" he breaks in inquiringly. "Did she look happy or troubled."

"Quite happy, as if she were dreaming some pleasant dream."

"Her mouth; was it smiling?"

"I think not, at least her lips were not parted, yet somehow she seemed to smile."

"I know! I know! Bless her sweet face, I know every turn and expression of it."

Juliet gazes at him wonderingly. She perceives a change has come to him during the last three hours. There is no longer any bitterness in tone or gesture, rather the bright steadfastness of perfect love and trust. She is at a loss to account for it.

"Are you thinking of going to rest," she asks him.

"No, not yet, but do not let me keep you

up. My thoughts will be sufficient company; I have many things to think about; I have also letters to write." He stoops and picks up a fragrant lace handkerchief she has let fall; as he gives it into her hand, "Good night Juliet," he says, "Good night, and thank you for your sympathy."

"Bertram, I cannot go to rest and sleep and leave you thus," she cries, passionately, disregarding his outstretched hand.

"Do not be distressed about me," he pleads, "the worst pain is over; I do not suffer much now, I am no longer restless nor impatient."

"Let me stay with you a little, you have been alone so long!"

"I am not lonely," he says, but he makes no further effort to rid himself of her company. He opens his desk lying on the table, and beginning to write, soon becomes oblivious of her presence. She, sitting some distance from him, on a low chair, makes no attempt

to engage his attention, or interrupt his labours. On and on speeds his pen. The candle dwindles lower and lower. It is nearly midnight, when at last he folds the closely written sheets of his completed correspondence; then suddenly pushing papers and desk away, he lies his head and arms upon the table, as if overpowered by fatigue or sadness.

"If I could only bear it for you," says a low sad voice at his side. He looks up directly, remembering with a start of annoyance that he is not alone. Juliet has risen, and is standing by him, in the dim light; the hauteur of her handsome face, and the gorgeousness of her rich apparel, softened and mystified by the obscurity. Beautiful and fair as the voluptuous dream-vision of an enamoured Eastern prince, reclining at noonday, among costly odours, 'neath a tropic sky.

"Juliet! you here still. How quiet you have been; I had absolutely forgotten you

were in the room till you spoke."

"Yes, I intended that you should forget my presence. I wish I could as easily make you forget other presences; the presence of pain and love, of doubt and hope. O I would lull you if I could into such a sweet repose as should soothe your senses into joy, and steal away for ever the corroding care of heart and brain. To see you suffer is a thousand times worse than any individual suffering of my own; it hurts me," (pressing her hands upon her heaving breast) "*it hurts me!*"

Her cheek is white; her deep eyes gaze at him with a wild fervour of longing; her hands pressed against her breast, are wreathed, and locked as if in physical anguish.

"Juliet, don't distress yourself," he says kindly, "you exaggerate my suffering, I am not fearing nor hoping just now. I have left the matter in God's hands; and you—you look pale—dear, don't stay up any longer, its getting very late."

The actress does not answer; the terrible passion that has been her ruin, body and soul, is holding her in its giant grasp, with a force that renders voluntary action impossible. She who has so often given way to it, does her best to resist it now; she who has worked like a slave for its gratification, tries for the nonce to play the master. Her face grows rigid with the horrid struggle; her lips and hands writhe like those of a person in a fit.

"Bertram!" she wails, in low bitter tones. "Bertram! I cannot leave you—"

The wildness in her eyes; the pallor in her cheeks alarm him.

"Juliet you are ill," he cries. "Let me get you some wine or something, this comes of your sitting up so late; it is my fault."

She does not speak. She leans heavily against the table, as if about to faint, and then as he rises and stretches out his arm to support her, she seizes both his hands, and

moaning and sobbing and sighing like a mad creature, she presses them vehemently to her cheeks and lips and neck.

"Juliet, be quiet—Juliet, try to control yourself; this is unworthy of you."

She neither heeds nor understands his words. She is for the time possessed with as cruel a demon as that which entered into the Jew of old, and would not come forth, "save by prayer and fasting." M, Valance brings his man's strength to bear; he captures her hands, holding them firmly, and forces her quietly down on a chair. She shivers, her head droops, her tears fall. He has conquered her. The paroxysm is over. He has helped her against herself. She feels his power as he stands over her, calm and masterful. She cannot raise her eyes. She trembles pitifully.

"Juliet, you wish to please me I know," he says, gently. "I want you to go away to your own room now and leave me, I intend to go to rest shortly myself. Will you say good night and go?"

He releases her hands. She gets up slowly, with bowed head; at the same moment the bit of candle that has been flickering feebly for the last few minutes, hisses down in the socket.

"Oh, there's the light gone. Good night Juliet," says M. Valance.

There is a rustle, a light foot-fall, the creaking of a chair pushed aside, and then, "Good night Bertram," comes sighingly across the room to him. The door opens, and after that there comes the silence of midnight.

"Thank God, she is gone at last," thinks M. Valance.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I come, my love, to thee!"

"Her life was winter, for her spring was nipt,
And she loved much; pray God she be forgiven."

STRONG AS DEATH.

SHE had gone about six yards. She went out by the folding-doors. She left one of them open; behind the other she crouches now. She has no plan on hand; she does not wait (not consciously) for the *dénouement* of any plot. It is her own wild heart that holds her there, bound hand and foot. She hears no movement in the room she has just left. M. Valance is evidently taking no steps to procure a light; all the better; all the less chance of discovery, which is the only fear she is conscious of, as her only wish is to remain near him. Near him through the

long dark hours; near him though he shall never know it; near him though he never sends a sigh or a word to greet her through the blackness; near him, yet cramped and cold and lonely; near him, yet far from him, as far as hearts can sunder. I dare not ask you to pity her, as she lies there in a huddled twisted heap, as though righteous hands had thrown her on one side—lies there, a lost desperate soul, suffering the worst torture that we mortals are called upon to endure; a forlorn reckless woman, sunk in the deepest depths of dreariest agony a woman's heart can know. I do not ask you to pity her; but, O remember that when He was on earth He did not turn away, He was merciful to such; remember this, and refrain from judgment; remember this and lay your hand upon your mouth * * *.

A dead silence; she cannot hear a breath; if he would only sigh or moan, or move. He must be sitting in the low chair he has

sat in all the evening, because he has not moved since she left him, and that chair was close behind him. He could not be standing all this time. Hush! what was that—a footstep? a footstep on the stairs, descending softly and hastily. A light streams in under the dining-room door; streams in and touches for an instant, the crouching form inside, and then suddenly withdraws, as though in disgust or horror at having rested on so vile a thing. Juliet is relieved, she half thought this midnight wanderer had come to took for her; Marie's angel come to avenge her daughter, and right her wrongs. Whoever it is has passed on. She breathes again. Hah! their business is with Bertram. She hears the side door of the school-room open; then a light pervading the apartment shows her Bertram, sitting where she has pictured him, sitting bowed together in the low chair, bowed and motionless. He has not heard the door open, he has not seen the light;

a voice speaks to him, calling him by his name, in tender yearning tones.

"Bertram!"

Juliet starts; her eyes glare in the darkness with a horrid surprise. She thought she had silenced that voice, with its hateful honied accents. Had the drug not worked then? or is Maizie walking in her sleep?

M. Valance raises his head, and looks strainingly towards the door. The light flickers and advances, and then a figure belonging to the voice appears. O what a lovely vision!

Juliet hides her eyes, digging her nails in her palms in a frenzy of jealous rage.

Maizie, with the soft flush of recent sleep upon her cheeks; Maizie, with her golden hair unbound; Maizie, with naked gleaming feet, and loose white wrapper flung about her; Maizie tender, trustful, and true, risen in haste to seek her love.

"Bertram, will you not speak to me? I

was coming to you long since, but I fell asleep, I know not how; I awoke just now in the dark, and I could not bear the thought of you waiting and wondering—so I got up and sought for you dear, though it is so late, to tell you—"

"Hush! hush! not yet—" interrupts M. Valance, wildly. "O God!" he groans, aloud, "give me strength to bear it!"

"To tell you that" (goes on the sweet voice) "I love and trust you more than any man on earth. Bertram, my darling, my saint, my hero, let me do you homage!"

She is kneeling before him; she has bowed her beautiful head; her lips, and hands, and hair caress his feet. He raises her in his arms.

"O Maizie," he cries—"*Maizie*," and then he lays his head against her bosom and bursts into tears.

"Darling, darling, how you *have* suffered. O forgive my base belief in others' words

against you. Darling—my darling, pray God that I may grow worthy of you."

* * * * *

"Flames inside," mutters Juliet, with a mad light on her face—a mad resolve in her eyes, "why not flames outside?" She gets up; she steals into the room where the lovers she has failed to separate lie clasped in each other's arms. "Flames inside * * best remedy * * flames outside * * all burn out together then—" So she keeps on muttering as she reaches out her hand and bears away the candle that lighted Maizie through the dark to her lover's side.

* * * * *

A wild, wild cry—then another, and another, ring through Castle Grange during the dark and the silence of the small hours. Men-servants come hurrying from their sleeping apartments below stairs; maid servants from their garret chambers. Even Lady Brooklyn leaves her warm bed, and donning

her dressing-gown and slippers, proceeds to the scene of action; at last she leans over the bannisters, and entreats somebody and everybody to tell her what is the matter. It is some time before the information she demands so urgently is supplied. At last a weird looking individual, in curl-papers and flannel gown, whom she scarcely recognizes as her trim maid Sarah Ann, rushes up to her and tells her in a breath "that Mrs. King is blazing away like mad, and every one is trying to put her out before she's burnt to death."

Lady Brooklyn retraces her steps upstairs again. She is a good deal relieved to learn it is only Juliet who is on fire, instead of the new drawing-room curtains, or dining-room drugget; but she is also anxious to do her best, and remedy the misfortune, such as it is; and she makes her way down again shortly to the scene of the disaster, with her arms full of cotton wool, and a bottle of sweet

oil lying on the top. She passes through a motley group of curiously apparelled servants, standing about outside the dining-room door, with awe-struck faces. One of them, the butler, in his shirt sleeves, opens it for her.

"Have the flames been extinguished?" she asks.

"Yes, my lady, and Mrs. King is in there, lying on the sofa; she is very bad, my lady."

Lady Brooklyn bustles in, and the man shuts the door carefully after her. He has had orders from M. Valance not to admit any one save Lady Brooklyn.

"I have brought some oil and wool," says her ladyship, advancing to the couch, over which M. Valance and Maizie are stooping. M. Valance moves aside at the sound of her voice, and she sees something lying on the sofa; something that once was Juliet King; something that looks like a heap of burnt clothes; a quivering sentient heap of charred rags.

"Good gracious!"

Lady Brooklyn lets her wool and oil fall in her dismay.

"Is she *dead*?"

"Hush! no—no—I wish she were," whispers M. Valance, hoarsely—"She is in such terrible agony."

"The doctor!"

"I have sent for him long since."

"Her husband!"

"I cannot telegraph to him till morning; he cannot be here till the evening at the soonest."

Morning—afternoon—have dragged themselves away. It is already dusking, and still the wild, doomed life lingers on. Everything has been done to retain it, though every instant of its sojourn is fraught with intensest torture. Everything has been done to hold it yet awhile, for the sake of the poor heart that is hastening to catch a last glimpse of all it loves.

She has not been moved from the dining-room. She lies on some feather beds that have been spread on the floor; lies there still (save for the involuntary quiver of agony that passes now and then through her tortured frame) and speechless; lies there displaying, the doctor declares, "a perfectly miraculous power of endurance." She hears him say it, and turning her deep eyes (the only recognisable feature in her face) towards him, she speaks, for the first time since the disaster. Her voice is very low and rough, and they can scarcely distinguish her words.

"It is nothing to the flames inside—the flames that cannot be quenched."

The doctor thinks she wanders and makes some soothing answer, but M. Valance knows differently, and he groans and turns away in a helpless passion of pity. She does not speak again for some time. The doctor and Lady Brooklyn leave the room for a few moments; then seeing she is alone with M.

Valance, she beckons to him to sit beside her.

"I want to tell you something — it will make no difference now, whether you know it or not—you have always disliked me." (He makes a gesture of dissent.) "Yes, you have, though you have tried to conceal it out of kindness, but I wanted to say—"

"Never mind now, whatever it was I forgive it."

A wistful look steals into the deep eyes, clear and bright with the radiant transparency that mortal anguish gives. "Kind Bertram, I wish to tell you I told Maizie a lie about you, and this afternoon I drugged her—I drugged your darling to keep her from you, that you might think she did not care for you—and—" a dreadful spasm interrupts her, causing her to writhe and curl like a storm-driven wave, but forcing never a moan from her firm-set lips. She tries to recommence as soon as it passes, but M. Valance prevents her.

"Hush! don't tell any more. I forgive it—I forgive it. Reserve your little remaining strength for Arthur, he will be here very soon."

"I wish I could die before he comes," she mutters, "I don't want to see his grief. Bertram" (whispering hoarsely) "there is one thing more I wish to tell you—I set myself on fire *on purpose*."

"Juliet! Juliet! God help you my poor girl."

"No, He won't, He never has; I have always had to fight alone, and the demon" (another horrible convulsion) "in my heart has been too strong, too—"

"Hark! I hear wheels. It is Arthur."

"He is—not much—too soon—" Then, as M. Valance gets up and goes to the door, "Tell him—he needn't come to see me if he doesn't like—tell him how horrid—"

But even as she speaks the door is opened quickly, and Dr. King enters. He goes to

her without a word. He kneels down where M. Valance has just been kneeling and looks at her scarred face, and fire-eaten limbs, with his keen professional eyes.

"Why have they not given chloroform?" he demands fiercely, turning to Bertram.

"She would not take it. She did not wish to lose consciousness. She preferred to bear the pain."

"Yes, yes, I do not mind it," corroborates Juliet, faintly.

"But, my darling" (with a piteous quiver in the calm voice) "you must be suffering *torments*."

"Yes, for a long time—a long time. Poor old Arthur!" (putting up a feeble hand to stroke his face) "don't look so dreadfully sorry, it will soon be over."

"Over, for you, but for *me?* O Juliet, Juliet, what shall I do without you?"

"Better," she gasps, and then a fit of panting comes on, and she cannot attempt

any more consoling. She is going fast; Dr. King puts his arm under her head. Her eyes are closed; a deathly hue is spreading over her cruelly marred face.

"Juliet," he murmurs, "look at me once again—once again, with those dear eyes, before you go away."

"Dear Arthur! kind Arthur!" she mutters, mumblingly.

"Are you going, going without one look?" he cries.

No, her eyes open suddenly; but, oh God, the grief! they turn from him and rest on M. Valance, standing at the foot of the couch; rest on him eagerly, yearningly! Her lips struggle to form some word; at last they succeed.

"Bertram!" He hastens to her; she cannot move; she cannot stretch her hands to him; but her whole passionate soul, now nearly on the wing, reaches out to him from her deep eyes, with a solemn intensity of mute demand.

She tries to speak; she struggles hard. M. Valance bends down to listen. All at once her power of articulation revives; a little breath is afforded her to make her last request; to utter her last farewell. This is the use she makes of it: "Kiss me just once, Bertram — I shall not care what happens after—just once—"

M. Valance hesitates.

"Kiss her," commands the man to whom the poor burnt woman's lips belong that crave the boon. So he bends nearer still, and lays his lips one moment on those of the woman who has lost herself, body and soul, to win his love—and *failed.*

A strange radiance lights up the ghastly disfigured face; an unearthly quivering smile curves the dying lips. "Not bitter—not hard—" she murmurs, disconnectedly, "I shall—remember it—*there*—"

She is lying on her husband's arm, but her eyes are still fixed on him she has loved

with the love that has been her doom. Still fixed, even as her husband showers down his parting kisses on her face. Still fixed, even as they glaze and darken.

* * *

THE END.

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